TIME O' DAY



"It Seems Selfish to Refuse Such a Tiny Bit of Pleasure"

TIME O' DAY

By
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With a Frontispiece by
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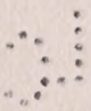


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CHAPTER I

THE O'DEAS

I BELIEVE I'll write down what happens to me. I think it would be fun. One forgets things so, as they get into the background, and it's so amusing, later on, to find what you thought of people at the time you met them, and not what you think you thought after you've got to know them a bit.

The idea struck me the other day, when I was reading over an old letter I found in my drawer, which I must have forgotten to post. It was to Maida Murray. She's my greatest friend. I suppose I wrote it when she was away on the Apple trip. I did laugh over it. It mentions all sorts of people that I feel so differently about now. I found a whole page all about a man I had just met and thought frightfully nice. Gus Wymondham his name is. However could I have liked him? I think he's the most detestable person I know. I wonder if I'll detest people I like now in another two years.

Wouldn't it be funny if I truly wrote down just what I think and feel, not pretending to myself, and

left it as an heirloom to my great-grandchildren? It'd be heaps more interesting than a novel, wouldn't it? And how they would laugh, to think the fat old frump with the wrinkles and five chins (I'm sure I shall be dreadfully fat when I am old) used to lose sleep at nights over men, and kiss them in the moonlight.

Doesn't that sound frightful? What a shameless old great-grandmother you have, my dear children; but she's going to tell you the honest cold truth, with no trimmings, and, anyway, I expect you're just as bad yourselves. Aren't you, now? Look your great-grandmother in the face and dare deny it.

Would you like to know anything about your venerable great aunts and uncles when they were young? They weren't a bit good, like your mother will tell you. Don't you believe a word of it! They had their little fling; and take your great-grandmother's advice and have yours, too. One gets old too quickly. Heigh-ho! she's getting old now; she's twenty-two. Isn't it frightful?

I'll tell you a little about them, if you like, but no long explanations. I hate explanations of any sort. The more you explain the more people wonder what your real reason was. Aunt Emma used always to say to me, "Never explain, my dear; people really don't care."

Anyway, like the poet's little girl, "we are seven." Dad, mother, Tam, Marjoram, myself, Fred (for the triplets don't count), and last, but by no means least, Beauty. Beauty is our goat. We used to call Mar-

joram Beauty once, but when we got what Tam called the genuine article we tossed up for the name, and Beauty won. She wouldn't really be so bad-looking if it wasn't for a black line running cross-wise over her face that gives her quite a diabolical appearance.

We have had her for years ; she's too old to be of any use now, but we keep her from sentiment. We got her ages ago, when we lived at Willibindi—our station, you know. The doctor ordered mother goat's milk for some reason or another. I shall never forget one night when mother tried to milk her. I forget why she did—perhaps dad bet her she couldn't—but anyway she had her brought into the kitchen. She made dad hold her horns, for Beauty seemed anxious to explore the place, and Tam and Marjoram and Fred and I, according to directions, each seized a leg.

Well, mother started. I don't quite remember what happened, but when I recovered we were all in different corners of the room, and dad looked like a folded concertina. Mother's awfully determined, and this just wound her up ; she said she'd milk that goat or kiil us all in the attempt. We were of the opin-ion she'd kill us. She tried again, but Beauty sud-denly recollected a pressing engagement in the next corner. Mother picked herself up and followed. Then Beauty found she'd mistaken the corner. Mother went too. After about twenty minutes we began to think we weren't going to have any milk after all. Beauty thought she'd put the matter be-

yond any doubt, and went for a constitutional. We didn't follow, but she came back next day.

Biddy hates her because she's a Socialist—at least, she never asks for anything she can take. Biddy's full name is Bridget Maria Susan Sophia Katherine Margaret Elizabeth Jane Roberts. It's a good thing Biddy hasn't to sign checks often ; even her initials would take a line. But she possessed eight maiden aunts, and each promised silver spoons at her death if Biddy was given her name. When they found out the result they all went back on their promise. It's no use trying to please everybody, but I think that's been said before.

Dad and mother I can't describe. You can't describe your parents unless they are particularly bad or especially good. If they're the latter you make them sound intolerable, and if the former it's undutiful to show them up. Tam is our eldest—his real name is Idris Llewellyn, but Tam is so much more convenient ; Marjoram is pretty ; the triplets are not really triplets, but just the youngest and three girls running, Ada and Fay and Betty ; and I've said Fred before, and me, Thyme O'Dea.

Of course my name's a joke and I have to live up to it. It's rather hard having to go through life as a joke, especially if you're a girl. Do sympathize, great-grandchildren ; every time I meet a man he makes a humorous remark on it, and seems to think it's a discovery of his own. I've cultivated a special laugh for the " time o' day joke " now. Our house is called The Seasons, though our friends mostly

lengthen it to "The Seasoning," on account of the variety it contains, or so they say.

Now, my dears, you've quite a different idea of your great-grand relations, haven't you? Yes, we were quite as much alive as you at one time, though we're dead now. Ugh! how I hate to think of being dead; life is so jolly.

I think I'd better start a new subject, don't you? I go on and on and quite forget to stop. Gordon calls me The Brook when he wants to be rude and La Belle Aude when he means to be polite. I forget who Aude was, great-grandchildren; perhaps you know. I think she was Roland or Oliver's sweetheart, I never can remember. Anyway, she was something nice to look at.

Gordon has a French streak in him somewhere. He is my pal. His full name is Gordon Meryon Haste, and he lives next door. Mrs. Haste is a widow, a sweet lavendery widow, like you read about, only she can be nasty when she likes, although she is so little. She looks so quaint beside Gordon; he's about six feet four I should think. Gordon's a journalist at present; he's on a Sydney paper, but I don't know how long he'll stop—he never stays very long at anything, which worries Mrs. Haste—but he is so clever he can always get a billet at something or another, and she has plenty of money to live on, so the boys haven't got to worry about her; and Gordon says, as he has no one dependent on him, why shouldn't he live his life as it suits him?

That's only fair, isn't it?

He's only been at this a little over a year; before that he was away in the West for a couple of years knocking about up-country and in the Northern Territory too. He's frightfully clever, he writes stories and verse and articles on all sorts of subjects, but he hates settled work; he likes going off to queer out-of-the-way places; he says that to learn things is living, the other is just stagnation. But he's a dear. Max is a dear too, only a different sort; he's a flirt. Max is his younger brother. He and I got rather fond of each other when Gordon was away in the West. Max has gone to the West too now, funnily enough; he went just before Gordon came back. He is traveling for his firm. He is a lot steadier than Gordon. He writes to me pretty often and I write to him not quite so often. It would seem horrid not to at all, because he really used to give me an awfully good time for a while; it would seem caddish to drop him just because he's away, and not let him hear any of the news, don't you think?

Of course his mother writes to him, but it isn't the same thing. She doesn't know all the little bits of interest I do. Who's engaged she knows, but she doesn't guess like I do who's likely to be engaged, and who's just quarreled, and what girls are blossoming out, and what are going off. I guess I'll have to number myself among those who are going off soon, although I don't think I've begun yet, but fair girls do fade in this climate quickly, and I'm twenty-two, you know. I'm getting old.

Isn't it funny how you change? I hate change, it

seems so sad. Every birthday I cry because I'm changing, and I feel most dreadfully wise—I suppose because I am still foolish enough to believe in wisdom. It's peculiar how we love to be thought knowing when we are really innocent. I never forgave my best friend, when I was just eighteen, for calling me a sweet unsophisticated little thing. Now, of course, I'd be flattered. You needn't laugh, great-grandchildren. I can look most—unworldly, shall I say? The recipe's simple. I lift my eyebrows a tiny puzzled trifle, part my lips just a wee to show a suspicion of teeth—my teeth are my one good point, or so Marjoram often kindly informs me—and open my eyes wide. I haven't found a man yet can resist it.

How funny it does seem now to think how miserable I was when Max went away, but I know I was. He spent most of his last evening with me, though of course he had to spend part of it with his mother, who adores him, and, do you know, we both nearly cried. I thought I was quite badly in love with him when I found he was going away, and I let him kiss me as much as he wanted to, for I knew he felt badly too. I had never let him kiss me before, except when I couldn't help it, because he was such a flirt. I wonder how girls can stop men kissing them when they insist. I can't. Perhaps it is I hate hurting any one's feelings; it hurts me so much more than them. When I have to tell a man he mustn't be cheeky I feel as horrible as I do when I have to pass an old blind or crippled beggar without giving him a penny. I couldn't do it as a child. When we went

to Melbourne, when I was little, I hated going out on the streets—there were so many beggars to pass. Dad and mother used to get so angry with me, for if they wouldn't give me a penny for every one we met I used to walk meekly beside them with tears streaming all down my face.

I suppose it's cowardly and weak of me, but I *do* hate being hurt myself and I can't bear to hurt any one else's feelings. Marje says I'm a soft idiot. I suppose I must be. I suppose that's why I write to Max, for often I think it's too much nuisance and I'll stop, but then he begs me not to be so mean—what can I do? Oh, well, perhaps he'll fall in love with some girl in the West and forget all about me, but he says none of them are as nice as me.

Gordon isn't a bit like Max. He's big and dark and rather quiet, but underneath the biggest tease you ever met. We all like him and his mother immensely. They live next door to us as I said, and having no sisters of his own, I think he rather likes just dropping in and talking to all of us, but he's my particular pal. I tell him all sorts of things, just like I'm doing you, and he's never shocked, though he often scolds me. Most outsiders think we are in love with each other because we go about a lot together, but we're not a bit.

I don't think I'm in love with any one just at present; I rather wish I were. I wonder how one can be quite sure and certain one is? Even when I am quite badly—the times I have been I mean—I've always had a suspicion at the back of my mind that

perhaps I wasn't. They don't sound reasonable together, do they? but they might both be true logically. They used to teach us logic at school, but all I ever learned was to prove a cat had three tails. I suppose you can do that, great-grandchildren? You postulate —

"No cat has two tails."

Agreed by the audience.

"One cat must have one tail more than no-cat."

Also agreed after deep thought.

"Therefore, since no-cat has two tails, one cat must have three tails."

I think they used to tell us that if things are contradictories only one can be true, and one must be true; but if they are only contraries, both may be false. Or, to make a philosophical question of it, I may be applying categories to a subject that is beyond categories, and so essentially falsifying love, if I try to make it subject to one or other answer.

Don't I sound clever? That's because I talk nonsense. No one can understand me, I'm so silly, Marjoram says; they get so bewildered they don't know whether it's me talking nonsense or themselves, but I argue it's clever of me to be able to make clever people feel silly. Don't you agree with me?

Sometimes I wish I weren't so silly and frivolous. I'd like to be beautiful and cold, one of the sort of women who never say a word in novels but just look disdainful: they never seem to try to amuse any one else, but every one always feels it his duty to amuse them. Edith Carson is like that. She walks about

like an icicle and her smile chills you to the bone, but nobody bothers about her much at parties—she's too hard to talk to, the men say. I wonder if there really are any women who won't bother to be agreeable who are fascinating? If I don't talk I'm dull, I know, and I'd hate men to think me dull.

I seem to be talking a lot about men, but the fact is I'm just beginning to think about them seriously. Of course I've always had a lot to do with them, even before I put my hair up, but till now all I've wanted was fun. I liked men making love to me, but I never wanted it to be serious, and I certainly never never wanted to get married. I suppose I'd never properly grown into a woman. Marjoram says I'm younger in some ways than Ada, and she is only eighteen. But marriage to me always seemed something away in the distance ever so far off. I knew I'd have to do it some day, but I never felt there was any hurry. I've always found life dreadfully dull if for a week or so I wasn't in love with somebody or somebody wasn't in love with me, either does; but marriage—that always seemed for other people. But now——

I've got to get married soon, and that's a fact. In a way I even want to. It'd be frightfully nice to have some one always bothering about you, wouldn't it? Some one you could always depend on to take you everywhere and think everything you do quite right. Nobody ever thinks anything I do right at home. I'm always in hot water for something. And it would be jolly always to come first to some one, and I should

like to have a house of my own, where I could do exactly as I liked and not have to make my goings and comings suit a dozen other people, and even if I did do anything dreadful there'd be only one to jump on me, not eight as at home. And it would be nice, too, to feel you were all the world to some one, not only for a month or two, but for good.

I'll tell you another reason why I'd like to. I couldn't tell any one really, but somehow in writing one can think aloud to oneself. I'd like a baby. I would. I'd just love one. I never used to think I would a bit. I thought they were the stupidest little nuisances one had to put up with. I used to suppose I'd have to have my share, like other people, but I always hoped it wouldn't be for several years after I married. But now at times I'd simply love to have one at once. Don't be shocked, you know what I mean; but all the same I do think it's such a pity one has to be married first, for there isn't a man I know I'd really like as a husband, but I'd give anything for a baby like Maida Murray's.

She used to live next door to us, too, on the other side. Her people do still, and she only lives a few streets away now she's married, and I'm always there; and her baby—I can't describe him—he's wonderful. He's just eleven weeks old, and I adored him from the first moment I set eyes on his black mop and chinky yellow-red face. Of course his hideous color soon wore off, with his hair, and now he's a blue-eyed, fair, pink and white, good-tempered angel, and he loves me to nurse him. I'm sure he

knows me, Maida thinks he does too; and I'm actually learning to knit so that I can make him some socks.

His name's Peterjohn.

Oh, well, anyway I'll have to marry soon, even if I don't find a man I like, for twenty-two is getting pretty old when you've got three younger sisters who are always telling you to hurry up and get off the family's hands to give them a chance. Of course Marjoram is older than I and she ought to go first, and I suppose she will. I'm expecting her to get engaged any day now, although she won't tell me anything; she's a secretive old thing, is Marje, she listens to all my chatter, but she never confides in me in her turn. But there's a man been coming here for quite a while now; his name's Peter MacFarlane, and he's a very nice fellow too. He's nothing frightfully particular in the way of a catch, but he's by no means undesirable, and didn't somebody once say it was no mean happiness to be seated in the mean? That's what I tell Marje anyway; I barrack hard for Peter MacFarlane.

You know Marje is a queer sort of girl; she isn't a bit like the rest of us, except Ada a little. She snubs people awfully at times, and I tell her she'd make a horrible old maid—she'd be the snappy sort. I think she'll have Peter. Any one can see he's fond of her, and I've told her more than once that if she doesn't mean to have him she ought to stop his coming. She's only shrugged her shoulders and said nothing, so I think she means to. I don't

know how she can, in a way, although I'm always telling her what a brick I think him. I *couldn't* marry him myself. But I honestly think he'll suit Marje pretty well; she's so matter of fact—and so is he, even about her.

Anyway, it's her funeral, and you know—though of course I wouldn't dream of saying it to Marje—she mayn't get another chance. She's so frank and snappy and blunt that I don't think many fellows would want to marry her, though they all like her tremendously. I suppose it's just the way you're built. Marje has friends and I have sweethearts, except Gordon.

Still I shouldn't be surprised if she never marries at all—there's no real need for her to; she can always earn her own living if mother makes it too nasty for her at home. Marje is a nurse; she's been through all her training, but she's not nursing now because she had typhoid some while ago, and the doctors said she must come home and take a rest. But she can't bear doing nothing, so at present she goes every other day to some sort of institution—I forget its name—that goes about visiting poor women and teaching them to cook simple invalid dishes and how to make babies' food properly, and nursing them for nothing. They do just splendid work, and Marje says you wouldn't believe how incredibly ignorant some of the poorer women are of the simplest rules of health.

She loves the work, but I think she'd like to marry some day all the same—every woman would. It's

all right while you're young, but when you're old it's so rottenly lonely; there isn't much in life if you can't take a real absorbing interest in some human being. When you're young the most absorbing person in the world is yourself and the things that are going to happen to you. But after they've happened, and there's nothing special to look forward to, life must be very grey unless you can start looking forward again in your children, or so it always seems to me anyway; and Marje adores children—always has.

Of course it's just as lonely for an old bachelor too, but then if he begins to feel it he can always get some woman to marry him up to almost any age; but once a woman has lost her youth no man will marry her unless for her money. I suppose there are exceptions, but I mean as a general rule, so unless a woman is very charming indeed she can't afford to go on refusing men indefinitely, just on the chance of Mr. Right turning up, because he might never come at all. I guess most women marry Mr. Nearly Right. And I suppose Marje will have to, like the rest—and me too. I wonder!

Heigho! well, I wish Prince Charming would hurry up if he's going to come, but I don't believe he often does in real life. I think I'll go and see Maida and my own sweet Peterjohn. I do wish you could see him, great-grandchildren, but I dare say he'll be a grandpapa by the time you hear of him, but he has the cutest smile that shows his dear gummy mouth. I'm getting so clever at managing him; Maida says I'm smarter than she. Neither of us knew anything

about babies before hers came, and she and I have always been such pals, from the time we used to sit in school together, that I feel as if he were at least half mine. We're learning all his pet likes and dislikes together; he loves lying on his stomach across your knees or shoulder, and he simply yells if you lay him on his back bathing him, and I let him suck my finger sugared when he has the hiccoughs. Oh, I think it's just fascinating learning about babies! I can't imagine how I used to find them uninteresting. Perhaps it makes a difference his being Maida's, but Jack—that's her husband—just roars at me.

Well, I must stop for to-day. I'm going out to the Lawrances' to dinner. Dolly wants me to meet her brother; he's a doctor, I think his name's Philip, and he's just back from Europe.

I wonder what you think of your great-grandmother now, great-grandchildren—oh, I'm going to call you G.G.C., the other's too long to write every time.

Of course you may never see this. I dare say it will be lost long before your time, or perhaps I shall tear it up.

Still, it's a bit of a lark doing it.

CHAPTER II

THYME MEETS BOB GALE

I'M horribly tired and feeling cross, too, so I've decided to write a bit and see if it will calm me down. I've been busy all day; mother had several people in to lunch, and that always means extra work for all of us, especially me, as I'm the cooking genius of the family. I don't know whether you've got the impression, because we go out a lot and entertain, that we're a family of useless ornaments; we're not, I can assure you—you're barking up the wrong tree entirely. We keep only a cook and one housemaid now; before Fay left school we used to have two, but neither mother nor dad believes in girls having nothing to do but amuse themselves. He says a lot of useless women who don't know how to fill in their time are a curse to themselves and every one else.

I never do any housework, I just hate it, the mere sight of a duster gives me dusterics (I invented that word), but I do all the fancy cooking, nearly. Biddy makes plain cake and puddings for ordinary days, but I make all the entrées and mayonnaise and sweets and fancy things. I really like it; but sometimes, when we have folk to lunch every day of the week, like this one, I get a bit tired. Mother's ter-

ribly fond of entertaining—it's all right for her, she doesn't have any of the work to do, only the flowers, and she'll never let any one else touch that part because she has just wonderful taste, every one says so.

I suppose in a way she has to, as she says, for dad's sake. Parliamentary men have to keep in with everybody, and it's even worse now dad's in the Federal and not the State Parliament. It was so funny to-day; he came home in a tearing rage—oh, just ramping and roaring—he stood in the drawing-room and stormed to us like a stump orator. It's a nuisance having a public man for a papa; he always regards us less as a family than an audience. He gets so mad with me at times because, in the middle of his most excited speeches (rehearsals), I giggle. I never mean to, I know it's rude, but I will see the funny side of it in a flash and the giggle's out before I can stop it. One good thing about it is he doesn't mind now if I'm absent from the rehearsals. So I generally am, except when I feel blue and want to be amused.

But I haven't told you yet what made him mad, have I? The Speaker ordered him out of the House. Dad was savage; he hadn't done anything, he said. I dare say he hadn't really; but still those members do slang each other dreadfully, if the reporters report truly. But we all sympathized with dad, till Betty said flippantly:

"Never mind, dad, pretty well every one else but you has been turned out before, so now you're in a

majority again, and all politicians love majorities ; so cheer up ! "

Dad is only Opposition now, for the Labor Party is in power, and we all just gasped at her speech, but dad only laughed ; he'll take anything from Betty. He and mother both adore her ; I'm bothered if I can see why—she's a perfect little imp. I dare say we're all jealous of her, for she's been allowed to do as she liked from a baby ; we others were brought up pretty strictly, we were a bit scared of mother and dad, but Betty never was. I believe she cheeked them from the minute she was born, and they actually seem to like it. Even when she was only a tiny kid, and dad would come home tired from a Par. debate, while we others kept discreetly in the background, Betty would march up, fling herself on his knees, poke him in his expanding waistcoat, and demand a penny.

And she always got it.

But if we others tried it we were generally reminded we had weekly pocket-money. You can't do anything with her now. She's always taking our pet pocket-handkerchiefs, and yesterday, if you please, I found her strolling round the garden in my satin bedroom slippers. My word I boxed her ears—I was mad—but I got into a fearful row with mother. We scarcely ever dare touch her, for she sets the powers that be at us, and we're told we're brutal to the poor child, and then she gets some new style of outrageous spoiling. But that's enough of Betty for this time, except that of course she's to have a pair of satin slippers for herself to-morrow. Spoiled brat !

Have I said I went to the Lawrances' to dinner last Friday? I enjoyed it so much. It was really a kind of party; there were about a dozen there. The famed Philip is too much like a marble statue for my taste. I dare say he's awfully clever—he looks it—but I prefer something a little more human. He's perfectly uncanny; his hands were like ice, and it was a hot night too. He's the sort that if his clothes got up and walked about by themselves you wouldn't miss much, though I dare say his patients would. I oughtn't to speak about him like that, for I believe he's terribly learned, and he was a Rhodes scholar and all sorts of things. He was very nice to me too; he talked to me a lot, but he's most irritatingly English. I suppose it's hard not to get their accent and manners when you live so many years there, but it always strikes me as affectation. Of course I know English people reckon we have a cockney twang, but as we consider them jammy I suppose things are equal.

After dinner we went out on the lawn. It was glorious outside; the sky was that smudgy night-blue that makes the stars look like pale holes in it, and the moon was tearing down to the west with Venus tagging alongside. The air had that tepid feel that makes everything too much bother. And I met rather a nice man there too; they started playing guessing games, and he and I were sent out while the others arranged the word. Dolly said we weren't going to play anything that meant getting out of our chairs.

He's really awfully nice. His name's Bob Gale. I had hardly noticed him before. He's nothing to look at, but, now I come to think of it, I have heard of him. They say Dolly's trying to run him lately, and he sat next to her at dinner. That will account for her being so frigid when she said good-bye to me; I couldn't make it out at the time. Why, yes, I suppose she would be rather annoyed, for we were together all evening after that. It wasn't anything out of the way in obviousness, but he just managed to get next to me every time. I was rather pleased; there wasn't any one else there I cared much about, and he talked interestingly. He seems to know a lot about cricket. I forgot to ask him what team he plays on.

I was rather amused when I came in from the lawn. I must tell you about it. He was sitting down, so I went to get a chair the opposite side of the room. It was a heavy old chair, and as I tried to pull it where I wanted to sit, near Lottie Hyles, he was beside me in a flash. With an "Allow me," he picked it up and deposited it beside another empty one. I thanked him and sat down, and he prepared to sit beside me, when Dolly dropped into it. I thought it was an accident at the time, but I see now she did it to try and drive him away from me. We caught each other's eye, and I laughed; I couldn't help it. But he wasn't beaten as easily as that. He just got another chair from somewhere and put it down the other side of me, and talked till we had to go home. He would have taken me home, but dad sent the

motor for me. Smith had to be up late anyway to bring dad home from the House, as they were having a late sitting. He doesn't like too many late nights—Smith, I mean—and as he's the least thieving chauffeur we've had for years, dad doesn't want to lose him. Isn't it awful the way some of them run you up bills for things you're certain you could never have had? Labor's awful to manage, isn't it? I tell dad if he wants to do any good for himself he'd better change sides and go over to the Labor Party. He wouldn't be the first turncoat in Australia by a long chalk.

I'd like to find out more about that Gale man. I've half a mind to ask Dolly round to lunch and see if I can make her talk about him. It oughtn't to be hard; Dolly's an awful chatterbox—still, I'm sure if she thought I really wanted to know, wild horses couldn't drag any information out of her. Of course I don't want to know particularly, but he was rather nice and said he hoped to see me again. He won't if Dolly has anything to do with it, I'm sure.

There's such a lovely view from my window while I'm writing this—the sky is like a big primrose scarf flung round the shoulders of the trees. Well, I must stop chattering and clean myself up again. I do get tired of dressing and undressing. Gordon and Peter MacFarlane—I call him Petermac for short—are taking us to the Dandies at North Shore. I'd rather go to bed myself, but Marje won't go if I don't, and it's my duty to help Petermac on in every possible way, don't you think?

Besides, Gordon would be disappointed if I didn't. It was my birthday last week, and he gave me a dozen of the most glorious embroidered linen hankys. Now I must just rush into another frock.

But I wonder if I *will* see him again. It's funny how some people come into your life and stay and are friends, and others you just lose for good. It hardly seems worth while letting yourself like them.

CHAPTER III

NICER THAN A BROTHER

I AM staying for a few days with Maida Murray. Jack has had to go up-country on business, and Maida hates being alone with only the nurse-girl in the house. I love staying with her too; we have such fun. She's only the same age as I, although she's married and has a Peterjohn, and she's up to any mischief still. She's not a bit like me to look at —she's small and thin, almost skinny, and very dark, but such a dear; we've always done things together. Of course we can't go out quite as much now, for Jack doesn't like racketing about to things like he did when they were engaged. He says he likes a peaceful life, and only married Maida so that he could have her company at home, instead of having to chase half over Sydney to get it; and Peterjohn's another tie now. But she asks everybody I want round when I'm there and joins in any fun that's going.

Gordon's been here several times. I see him almost every day now, some time or other; it's just like having a brother nicer than the real thing, for Fred is always out with other people's sisters, and Tam, as I told you, I think, is managing Willibindi. Really, I don't know why Gordon should be so nice

to me, for he is so clever and I'm the most frivolous idiot on earth. But he talks such serious things to me, just as if I were as brainy as himself, and I think it's darling of him. Socialism and Bernard Shaw (he lent me all his plays) and religion and politics and shares—you'd hardly know Thyme O'Dea with Gordon. I can't always understand him, but I do always admire him.

He's so big too. I just adore big men. He could tuck Mr. Gale under one arm—not that Mr. Gale is little, really, but Gordon is so big. He has dark, solemn eyes, and he has to wear glasses most of the time, which spoils his face, but he has the most beautiful mouth I've ever seen on a man—when he smiles it's lovely. I told him so once, and it's the only time I can remember his being really vexed with me. He told me not to be a little fool. I was just furious for a minute; then, just for mischief, I bent over and kissed the thin patch on the top of his head, and said, "Diddums," and then he had to laugh. Now and again when I feel particularly good-natured I give him a lop-sided pat or half a hug, he's just like my brother, you see, we've lived next door to each other since I was a flapper, but he never touches me. I like him because of that, and it's all the nicer of him not to when I treat him so carelessly. The first thing I can remember about him is that soon after we came I smashed something or other of his which he valued, and he called me a meddling tortoise-shell cat. I retorted that he was an ugly hump-shouldered stew.

That was the cementing of our friendship.

He is a bit round-shouldered still, and that annoys me dreadfully. I'm always telling him to sit up; it looks dreadful with his height. The funny thing is he's ashamed of his size, he hates being so tall; he says he feels downright ridiculous going out with me, when I don't come near his shoulder and he has to bend over to speak to me. I should think the only thing a man could mind is being small with a big girl; somehow one feels one wants to look up to a man. I wish Mr. Gale was bigger, but still I've found out one exciting thing about him; just imagine, great-grandchildren, he's an interstate cricketer! I wondered why his face was vaguely familiar, but I couldn't place it at all. Of course I've seen it lots of times in the newspapers in groups; I remember seeing him play last year—he did the hat trick. I can't understand my not recognizing him at once. I just love men who do things. I wish Gordon would take to sport, even if it was only tennis; he'd be splendid at that, he has such a tremendous reach he could stand on the back line and make them bounce right above the others' heads. But he won't; he prefers reading his silly old Nietzches and Blatchfords, and he makes me perfectly cross.

Of course he can be energetic if he chooses. He cut Maida's lawn for her last night; the man who usually does it hasn't turned up for a fortnight, so the look of the place is entirely dependent on Jack's exertions. He has a happy little knack of doing this every now and again, generally in the hottest

weather, but Maida's afraid to sack him for fear she won't get anybody at all; men by the day are almost rarities. She's been having a terrible lot of trouble with washerwomen too lately. You know they won't come out to Rose Bay, even though you pay their fares; they say it takes so long to arrive they have to get up too early. Why, poor Maida engaged one wretched woman three separate times, and each time she slipped her up. Maida and I had to turn to and wash some of Peterjohn's things ourselves—you should see me with suds all over my arms, dears.

The night before last I made Gordon scrub out the nursery. You'd have screamed to see him; he had a huge apron on, and his shirt-sleeves rolled up, and a pair of Jack's old slippers on, and his old glass specs shook as he scrubbed away seriously—I nearly dropped Peterjohn with laughing, and Maida had to laugh too, though she was wild with me for suggesting it.

But Maida had said she would have to do it herself next day, for the charwoman hadn't turned up again, and she couldn't have Peterjohn sleeping in a dirty room, and she was afraid to ask the nurse to do it for fear she'd give notice, and in this hot weather to be without any help at all would be no joke, so I said to Gordon, who was lounging on the veranda with us, "Oh, you'll scrub it out for her, won't you, Gordon?" I really didn't think he would, but he's tremendously good-natured, and asked straightway for a bucket of water.

Maida protested like anything, but when Gordon does get an idea in his head—although it takes years to get one in, I often tell him—he's as obstinate as a bob-tailed lizard, and he wore her down by calmly remarking that if a little bit of a thing like her could contemplate the job, it wouldn't hurt a fellow his size. And he did it too, scrubbing-brush, apron and all. And I think it was just darling of him, don't you? That's Gordon all over, he hasn't a bit of false pride, he'd do anything to help a friend without ever worrying his head as to whether it was beneath his dignity or not. He looked such a funny old giant too, swilling the water about, with the veins standing up on his arms as he scrubbed.

I think the play of a man's muscles is fascinating, don't you? The less clothes a man has on the better; they always look their best in rowing or football clothes. Gordon says it's the remnant of the primitive adoration of mere brawn that existed when strength was the only asset and the aim of every belle was to entrap the biggest man of the tribe. But with regard to women he says hidden beauties simply top the score of attractiveness. Man's being a jealous animal is the reason for his eternal scoffs and jokes at the *décolleté* evening dress. He hasn't the slightest objection to seeing as much of her charms as a woman cares to display; what stultifies his gratitude is that other men are equally favored. The average taunt of indecency might easily be translated jealousy. Men are a thousand times more jealous than

women; their jealousy is of a different brand. Woman is jealous of the beloved caring more for others than for her; man is jealous of the whole world caring at all for the beloved—her inclinations quite apart. He says you can't expect a man to come down to being even first fiddle after having been the whole orchestra.

Gordon has awfully funny ideas, don't you think? He says he knows too much about women, and that's why he'll never marry. He doesn't think girls like him, and you know it's so absurd, because they do, or they'd like to like him if he'd let them. Most of them are a bit scared of him, I think, and I know some are quite envious of me knowing him so well, for he's a fine man to look at on the whole, though you couldn't call him good-looking. But I do wish he wouldn't insist on wearing tan boots with a navy suit; he looks awful. He hasn't an atom of taste as far as dress goes, and he's such an obstinate wretch he won't take advice; he simply doesn't care how he looks. I do like a man who carries himself well and dresses well, don't you?

Mr. Gale does, you know; he looks just the pink of perfection in any clothes. I saw him in the street the other day talking to a very pretty girl; I don't know who she was, and he didn't see me. Wasn't it disappointing? I haven't seen him since. It was Dolly told me about his being R. H. Gale, the cricketer. Of course I've seen his name in print, over and over. She gave me to understand he is her property.

Is he, Miss Dolly? We'll see!

That girl's an out and out cat; I never met a real specimen before. They're having another party next week, a peanut hunt in the garden. I wonder if he will be there, but of course I didn't dare ask Dolly.

There, I've used quite enough of Maida's note-paper, and I hear my darling Peterjohn yelling for his Thyme. I must fly and comfort the rascal; he ought to be asleep too. If he only realized the depths of my devotion to him he'd be too grateful to yell. I've pricked my fingers black to-day trying to sew lace on a petticoat for him; I hate sewing by hand, you get so used to a machine.

The yells are getting deafening, and Maida is busy dishing up the dinner. Jack will be in presently; he gets back to-night, and I'm going home.

That's enough for to-day.

CHAPTER IV

MARJE AND PETERMAC

I FEEL quite exhausted. I've been playing gooseberry to Petermac and Marje ; it's a trying situation. We had all arranged to go to the pictures, and at the last minute Gordon couldn't go—some old reporting stuff—and to my disgust I had to make a third, for it was too late to get any one else, and Marje wouldn't go without me ; it's funny the way she always dodges being alone with Petermac now. I sometimes think she doesn't want him to propose at all. I know she won't dare refuse him, at least I don't think she will, but I believe she's trying to put off the evil day. I don't know whether she doesn't like him or whether she's just a bit scared of getting married at all. I can't think there's any one else she can be fond of, although once, when I was giving her advice about Petermac, she said to me, with a funny smile, " So if you can't have the man you like you must like the man you can have—that's your idea, eh ? "

She's worse than I am for bluntness at times.

If I were Petermac I'd have given up long ago, but he's as obstinate as she ; that's why I think he'd be just the husband for her. Nothing disconcerts him. You know she bribes the triplets to come into

the room if she and Petermac happen to be left alone. So the other night Fay picked up her sewing and opened the door; we happened to be in the passage, and we nearly collapsed when, just as she set foot inside, Petermac said gently, "Close the door behind you when you go out, will you, Fay?"

Fay just stared at him for a minute, and then joined Betty and Ada and me, who were rolling round the passage nearly choking with laughter. Fay said she'd never, never go into the room again no matter what Marje offered her. She was as mad as hops at first, but she had to laugh too in a minute. I think it was real neat of Petermac, don't you? I don't know how Marje will protect herself now that the triplets have gone on strike. I'm afraid she won't be able to avert the crisis much longer. I can read it in Petermac's eye.

I could murder that little beast of a Betty, she and I are always fighting, and yesterday, if you please, she found some letters of Max's in one of my drawers, and she has been quoting slabs of them at me ever since. I could kill her. In front of a drawing-room full of people to-day she struck a sentimental pose in front of me and said loudly, "You're the sweetest girl, born or unborn. I go to dream of you. Good-night!" Of course everybody laughed, and she explained in her horribly innocent way that she saw it in a letter of Thyme's. I wished the floor would open and swallow me. She's rather young and childish-looking for her age, with short dark curls all over her head, and that's why people excuse half the

outrageous things she does. And on top of that she went and told Gordon all about it. Not that he listened, but he couldn't help hearing a lot before he could get her out of the room, and then she nearly kicked him black and blue.

She's a little cat, but mother can't see a fault in her; she puts it all down to Betty's high spirits. I'd high spirit her if mother went away for a month. She has gone to a dinner at Government House to-night; she looked just lovely, far too young to be the mother of all of us, she's hardly got a wrinkle, and we'll none of us ever be as lovely as she, unless perhaps Fay. But I'm always afraid of her, she seems like a statue. I can never remember her any other way. She never played with us or petted us as kiddies, the old gins round the place had more to do with our bringing up than she, and of course we had governesses. We're all jolly and laughter-loving like dad. Betty is like mother in her ways. I don't believe she cares for anybody.

But I think it was the limit to tell Gordon. His own brother, too—even fourteen ought to have more decency than that. I told dad of her, and he actually gave her a good talking-to, but I don't suppose it will do her much good.

Oh! I never told you I ran into Mr. Gale in the street the other day. I was just strolling down Pitt Street to my tram after physical culture when we nearly walked into each other; we both stopped the same second, and he looked so pleased to see me. He coaxed me to go and have a cup of tea with him,

so we just dashed into the Civil Service, as we were opposite, although I knew I shouldn't have. It made me late for dinner and mother was annoyed.

We had such a nice talk, but I guess Dolly will be mad. She's sure to hear of it; we saw nearly every one we knew, that's the worst of the Civil Service at half-past four. He's going to Dolly's party; it came out casually somehow. I think I mentioned I was going, and he said, "So am I." He saw me down to my car. He has such nice eyes—they're reddy-brown; his hair's rather red too, but somehow it's nice on him. I told him I knew now he was the cricketer, and he just laughed and said, "Please don't," in such a pleasant way, not deprecating or mock-modest style, but just in a careless way, as if it honestly didn't matter much at that minute. I said:

"Don't be so silly. Why, I just adore real cricketers. I wish I had a brother good at it."

He said back mischievously, "Perhaps I may be grateful to my reputation yet then."

He has very talking eyes.

I'm glad he's going to the party.

But I'm rather worried about Max. I wish he wouldn't write so regularly. Have you any correspondents who worry you, G.G.C.? Still, I don't see why I should worry. He's not very sentimental; I told him if he was I wouldn't write any more. I generally give his letters to Marjoram; she likes to read them. She's very fond of Max—indeed we all are; we like all the Hastes immensely. Mr. Haste

used to be very friendly with dad before he died; they were in the Senate together.

Look, you shall judge for yourselves. This is Max's last letter, barring the front page, which I've lost:

"You want to know how I'm getting on, you say" (I did ask him that to stop his writing more rubbish). "Well, I'm roaming the country in a dear little sulky which I nearly lost yesterday crossing a creek. The ford was a bit flooded, but I got across safely. However, an old country couple, following just behind, were not quite so lucky; they got off the track, and, though they stuck their number nines manfully up on the dashboard, the water rushed in and swept away gardens of cabbages and bushels of eggs. Of course I had to go to the rescue.

"I camp out if I'm too far from a township at sundown. My mattress is a black boy broken into tiny pieces in a sack, another sack with chaff in it makes a pillow, and, with a rug or two, there you are. I wouldn't care to call the Queen my aunt if I were only a bit warmer. I'll give you my average routine.

"Rise, shave, dress, make up fire, get out tucker-box, boil eggs or open a tin of sardines or meat, make coffee, spread the table-cloth (another sack) and attack the real part of the business. Fold up the tent, pack the tucker-box, and hunt for the horses; they are to be found hobbled somewhere within a mile of camp, you guess the direction or toss up a penny. Harness them, and drive, drive, drive to the—to the next stopping-place.

"Of course if you're lucky you'll get bogged just as you have picked out in your mind's eye a nice spot to camp across the gully. The horses get stuck and finally lie down, as horses do, with an air of renouncing further responsibility. Unharness them, whip them till they flounder out, and then with a little speech suitable to the occasion—generally short and lurid—you pick your way back to the buggy and carry out every single article it contains to dry land. Then you try to dig out the wheels with a stick; at the critical moment the stick breaks, so all you have to do is—get another. Put stones underneath the wheels, lengthen the traces with rope, and set the horses pulling on dry land while you pant and push behind. By this time it will be quite dark, so after lighting a fire you take a billy and matches and hunt for water. If you can't find a dam or soak, you must take creek water—tadpoles, mosquitoes and all. Then you go to sleep and (if you're me) dream of a little girl with blue, blue eyes, blue as the rings sunlight makes on your toes through the water when you're bathing.

"Give my love to the triplets and your father. Is old Gordon well? Yours with love.—MAX."

He writes rather a nice letter, doesn't he? But Marjoram says I ought not to let him go on writing when I don't care. I don't see what it matters to her; I got quite cross yesterday, and said so. I don't interfere with her and Petermac. What has Max to do with her? She only looked at me funnily and went out.

But I don't see why she need be nasty. I can't write and tell him I won't write any more because I think he's falling in love with me, can I? He's never exactly said he was, not in so many words. Besides, it would hurt him dreadfully. He expects to get a holiday some time this year, and I can explain things then, can't I? It'll be easier to say. And, you know, when he's away up-country like that, so much alone, he might get melancholy, mightn't he? And suppose he went and committed suicide, I should never forgive myself, and his mother wouldn't either. Men do things like that, too, when there's something preying on their minds and they're alone a lot.

I think Marje is quite unreasonable. I'm only trying to be nice to everybody, but you never get any gratitude.

Mrs. Haste is aggravating too. She worships Max. I don't think he's said anything about it to her, but all the same she seems to consider we're demi-semi-engaged, and I do get angry with her at times—the things she says! Nothing, of course, that I can lay hold of. And Gordon has the wickedest smile in the corner of his spectacles while she's talking. He's a wicked tease. It's so funny, she doesn't like me and Gordon being friends; I believe she's afraid he'll cut out her darling Max.

Good-bye. I must mend a tear in my chiffon dress. I want to wear it at the party to-morrow. One blessing about chiffon is it doesn't show holes, though, as Gordon said when he saw me in it, it

shows pretty well everything else. But he's always rude, and it's my favoritest frock. He's not going to the party. He scarcely ever will go to Lawrances' ; he dislikes Dolly, who returns the compliment. It's a wonder he doesn't like her, for she's very pretty in a dolly way, and Gordon worships prettiness. He's got a real sentimental streak in him, only he hides it well, but he says she's unforgivably silly. He says you don't want brains in a woman, but you do common sense.

CHAPTER V

POOR IDA

IT'S a nasty cold day and I feel grumpy, yes, decidedly grumpy, G.G.C.! If I were only about forty years older, and any of you were born, you would be whispering to each other, "Keep out of the old dragon's way to-day, her liver's out of order."

But, you see, I haven't got a liver yet, so perhaps it's indigestion or just feeling cold. No wonder northern peoples are phlegmatic and deliberate in disposition; who could get up enthusiasm about anything when they've got the shivers? Dad says I must have a rotten circulation, I feel the cold frightfully. I love the heat. They make me take dozens of iron pills, but I don't seem to get any warmer.

I hate seeing a grey sky too, don't you? I don't mind a blacky grey sky with a bad-tempered wind whooshing across it—that's movement, and there's always a thrill about mere movement—but this is a dull sky, like greasy cold pudding, and the very roses outside look depressed; they know they are going to get all draggled and wet to-night.

I think I'll run in and see Ida Lester. I don't believe I've mentioned her before, have I, G.G.C.? Still, I can't tell you the names of all my friends at one sitting. She lives the other side of us to the

Hastes. She hasn't been there long; she and her husband have taken the house Maida's people lived in—they are letting it while they are away in Europe. Ida's nice, but I don't think I like her husband much. He's big and fat and rather handsome, but he always reminds me of a bookmaker, not that I ever met a bookmaker to talk to, but he's like what I've always imagined they must be, and he wears a huge diamond on his little finger; I hate rings on a man. Perhaps I was thinking of her when I said that most marriages one actually meets don't seem nearly ideal or like you read of in books. I don't think he and Ida are very fond of each other; she's always out with other men, never with him, and they say he's rather what we used to call at school a "Wein, Weib und Gesanger": not that we knew quite all it meant then, but we thought it sounded grown-up and frightfully knowing.

But Ida never complains about him, so I suppose they get along as well as most. They have no children, but a younger brother of Mr. Lester's lives with them. His name is Lance, he is very fond of Ida, and goes everywhere with her instead of her husband; it's rather lucky for her having him for garden parties and balls and things, although anyway I don't suppose she'd be stranded, she's the sort men go crazy over, she's always got one or two tagging after her. I wonder Mr. Lester doesn't object, but as far as I can see, on the rare occasions he is home, he's civil enough.

Besides, if my husband left me for other women,

I'd behave exactly like Ida. I don't blame her a mite. She's young still and only wants fun; I'm sure she's straight, though mother once or twice lately has told me she'd rather I didn't get too friendly with her. I wonder who has been putting mother against her, for she used to like her when she first came. We never knew her before that, but now she and I have become very friendly. I have the run of the house, and go in and out just as I used when Maida lived there. There's a little gate down our side garden that leads into theirs, and I often slip in that way and straight up to her room without bothering the maids.

Of course, Ida's all right and a dear too, but I do think she goes a bit strong with that brother-in-law of hers at times. I don't like him, and although she treats him like a real brother, I'm sure—it sounds an awful thing to say and perhaps I oughtn't—but all the same I'm sure he's rather in love with her; I've seen him look at her when she wasn't looking. But as long as she doesn't care for him it's right enough, isn't it? And, anyway, he's not the only one.

I wonder what it is about her, for she's not so marvelously pretty—in fact she's not as pretty as I, vanity quite apart—but I'm sure no man would go as dilly about me as they seem to do about Ida. Perhaps it's partly because she's married and I'm not. The fruit that's supposed to be out of reach is generally the most enticing; and besides, a man who makes love to me has got to chance the responsibility of marrying me and taking me over for life, whereas

with Ida—unless, of course, her husband divorced her. I say, wouldn't mother be shocked if she saw me writing things like that! Maybe you will be too, if you're granddaughters, but I don't expect so; by the time you are grown up I dare say women will really be allowed to say aloud what they think. I wonder if they ever will.

You know it's funny, but Maida doesn't like Mrs. Lester either. She said to me only the other day:

"She's a wrong 'un, Timmy, I'd bet anything. She's a medlar, not an apple; she looks just bonny on the outside, but you bite in and you'll find she's rotten right through. She's sweet and charming and everything else, and she can be just anything she likes, but there'll be a bust-up in that household some day, Timmy, and if you take my advice you won't be mixed up in it. You'd look pretty, wouldn't you, giving evidence in a nice savory divorce case!"

We had quite an argument over it. Of course I think she's quite wrong, but once Maida takes a dislike to any one you might as well argue with a post, so I said no more. I believe Maida's so set against her because she and Mr. Lester don't get on. I've noticed people who are happily married are apt to be a bit hard on others who have somehow made a mistake in theirs. And she and Jack are terribly in love still; he kissed her ankle to-day when we were lying on the lawn, and they've been married nearly two years. They don't mind me a bit, you know. Jack likes me, he says he never counts me a visitor; and yesterday, too, when Maida burst into the room

with me when he was brushing his hair in his shirt-sleeves, he just grinned cheerfully and said we made him feel as if he owned a harem. But Maida said he'd have given her beans if it had been any one but me.

And then after, when Jack was playing with Peterjohn, they both looked so contented, and when she took him from Jack to put him to bed they both kissed the top of his head together and then each other across him. When I go there I feel like getting married next minute, but there aren't so many Jacks knocking round the world, Maida is convinced there's only the one . . . and there's lots like Mr. Lester.

Poor Ida!

CHAPTER VI

"THYME'S LATEST"

DO you know I can't help thinking about that party? It's perfectly ridiculous, but I can't help it. You'd think I was a recently emancipated flapper, but I'm really rather interested in Mr. Gale, and I never would have believed I could like a man with red hair before; his hair is outright red, I must admit, though when you're with him you feel at the back of your mind it must be the effect of the sunlight, and it's really copper-colored. I can't help thinking of him when he put me in the car that afternoon and stood for just a second with his hat off and the sun making his head positively blaze. Aren't women fools! We do drivel over the tiniest things. But he has such a nice way of shaking hands. It's not a squeeze, of course, like some horrid men have—I think it's such cheek—but it very nearly is; it seems to convey all a squeeze means without its impertinence. And his smile is the frankest and straightest I've ever met; it looks at you and says, "Ah, come now, be friends," and you've got to. I wish he was bigger, that's all. I think Gordon has got me used to big men, but somehow when I'm with him I simply never realize he's any size in particular at all.

I can't make out why I went to tea with him

though; I don't as a rule when I only know men so slightly, and I had met Gordon earlier and refused to go with him because I knew mother would be mad if I was late. We all hate vexing mother because she can say such horrible things. She never loses her temper or frowns, but she talks like acid, and it seems to mix up with everything you're eating and choke you. Of course I didn't tell why I was late; I said I had been shopping. But Betty gave the show away. Dolly Lawrance told the triplets—she saw us herself as it happened, although we didn't see her—and as she came home in the same tram with them, she gave them the news when they wondered why I hadn't caught it too.

It was mean of her to do it in front of Betty. I don't mind Ada and Fay so much, they are grown up enough now to have a fellow-feeling, but that kid—— The only thing I'll say for her is she did not give him his proper name; she refers to him as Mr. Storm or the Stormcloud, but she jokes about him every chance she gets, and even insisted on telling Mrs. Haste about "Thyme's latest." Do you wonder I can never feel sisterly to the little imp? And Gordon too—after I had refused to go to tea with him, wasn't it awful! Mrs. Haste was shocked, I could see. She thinks I ought to pine away in a turret tower all by myself till her Max gets back. See if I ever have anything more to do with boys who have mothers! What annoys me most is that she is a charming little old lady, and I hate her to disapprove of me.

Drat that Betty! Though Gordon only laughed, as I knew he would. He asked if this was the last or only the latest, and when I said "Neither," crossly, he chuckled harder than ever and said my methods were rapid then. He and I went to Manly last night. It was such a glorious evening. I don't care what any one says, Manly sometimes is the most glorious place on earth, even the harbor-side, with that dim pine walk, looks alluring; but toward the ocean, when you climb up the Head and look down on the lights all along the walk, and out to sea, it is just calm and bigness. Oh!

But I've never seen it as beautiful as yesterday. The sea was like a mirror flecked with a soft purple tinge I have never seen on water before, and the sky was purple too. Such blendings of color, such nuances stretching from dark violet to palest grey, and the little boats rocking lazily on the long low swell, while the band in the distance crooned them to sleep. Not a breath of wind—even that seemed under the spell. Slowly it grew dark, and the lights along the esplanade grew brighter and made lines of quivering fire in the water. Out to sea a star seemed to rise from the middle of the blackness; it was on a yacht, invisible, and everywhere was silence, dark and silence. Now and then a trail of phosphorescence slid along the water where an adventurous fish whisked up, that was all.

And then the soft sucking sound of the water on the rocks below. I just caught hold of Gordon's sleeve and listened. We had the lovers with us too,

or we shouldn't have gone as far as that, but they were out of ear-shot. They seemed to be unusually silent—I wonder if Petermac has done the deed.

I like the long walk back to the pine plantation too, with the sea complaining and splashing softly on your right, and on your left the mile or so of huge rock towering above you, with the tufts of grass and trees on its rough old face like ragged whiskers, and the seats in all the dusky corners, and the glimmers you see of light frocks, and of arms round waists—doesn't it seem funny, G.G.C., things that would be the limit in bad taste anywhere else only provoke a sympathetic smile at the seaside?—and I even like the wet shine of the water trickling down the rocks; it was wetter than usual last night. Gordon had to lift me over some of the puddles.

But I like going home on the ferry best of all. Do you think there can be anything in the world more beautiful than Sydney Harbor at night? There's always such a fairy-landish, lit-up-for-the-occasion look about it, don't you think? I love the headlights on Cremorne, and the red and green guiding lamps, and the glitter of the ferry-boats to Neutral and Mosman, crossing each other like shining caterpillars glowing like diamond brooches on the black water. And then Circular Quay, the centre of the whole big radiance, like the crux of a pantomime drop-scene, and the city for background, with advertisements flashing out in electric signs now and again.

I can never get tired of looking at it. I often wish

we lived on the other side of the harbor, just for the pleasure of having to cross it every time one wanted to go to town. Don't laugh, great-grandchildren, but often I sit outside on the ferry and watch the quay sparkling until I just ache with the beauty of it all. I wonder if heaven will make one feel like that. I often think, too, it looks as if half the stars in the sky had dropped down to light up Sydney—dear, idle, happy-go-lucky Sydney!

Gordon is an old idiot. We had to run for the ferry, for he would stop to look in a funny little candy shop that had the comicalest kind of sweet in it you ever saw, with a huge card printed:

> "Hokey pokey winky wy,
> Give it to the girls to make them shy;
> It sticks in your mouth and makes you jump
> To buy some more at a penny a lump."

Gordon said he would have bought me some, but he knew the quantity he could afford wouldn't have any effect on me. Impertinent thing! Yet I like his cheek better than most men's niceness. Gordon does interest me awfully. I'm never dull with him. Most people find it extraordinary the way we are always out together, for you must understand, if I haven't already explained, he's something out of the way in cleverness—he's an A. M. and a B. Sc. and dear knows what else—and what he doesn't know about Shakespeare, and Chaucer, and triangled parallelograms, and ellipses, and stratified rocks,

and animals' insides, wouldn't worry Pallas herself; and me—well, everybody knows Thyme O'Dea!

Most of them work it out that he's in love with me—clever men generally marry fools—but it isn't that a bit. We just somehow feel at home with each other. We don't put on airs or our best mental clothes or manners in each other's company; we act as we feel, and in some queer way we fit—that's the real explanation of friendship, I suppose. I tell him nearly everything I do, even about the men I'm in love with for the time, even some things I can hardly tell Maida, although I tell her everything too; but a man is different, and I know heaps about him nobody else knows. You'd never dream it, but Gordon is really shy with most people; some think he's proud, and he isn't a bit, though he can't be bothered with everybody. When I scolded him and said that was conceit, he said it wasn't—the people he doesn't think worth while are probably worth while to some one else, and it's better for them to go there and enjoy themselves than to bore and be bored politely with him. And if he doesn't think any one worth his time, he never pretends; that's why lots hate him, Dolly for one, for he's no more merciful to girls than men.

And yet, you know, in a way he's shy of women, though no one but me has ever guessed it, and at the same time he's terribly fond of them. But when I taxed him with it, he said no man was consistent throughout. He simply adores pretty girls, just for their prettiness. Quite lately a flapper of about

seventeen came to live opposite; she was downright lovely, and Gordon used to watch her comings and goings. He simply lived on the sight of her, and yet when I offered to introduce him, he wouldn't let me, and once when he met her out he wouldn't say a word to her. Isn't he queer? But he explained that he only likes them the way he likes pictures; pretty girls are so disappointing to meet, they rarely have two ideas in sequence. I asked him what about me, but he just laughed and said he'd known me so long the disillusion had lost its sting.

I boxed his ears and then kissed the top of his thin patch. Isn't he a rude old thing? He says, when I've been talking more than usual nonsense, that he reckons heaven must be a place populated by beautiful girls who never speak.

Now I must go and get dressed for the party. I do hope it's nice and I do—yes, I do hope Mr. Gale's there; it will be rotten if he isn't. Gordon isn't going. I'm rather glad, because if he did I would have to talk to him, and I want to talk to the red-headed man. How humiliating if he prefers Dolly. But I don't think he will.

Anyway, I'll soon know.

CHAPTER VII

BESIDE THE LAKE

I DID enjoy the party, it was better than I thought it possibly could be, so of course you can guess Bob Gale was there. Of course I don't call him Bob to his face, but I think of him as that and it's shorter to write—if you like a man you never think of him as Mister.

And I had really thought it would be beastly when I went. Everything went wrong all day—some days are like that, aren't they? First of all, Betty and I had a free fight in the morning. I found she had borrowed a pair of my shoes. Now if there's one thing infuriates me it's that: my shoes and my gloves are two things I won't lend to anybody; I'd sooner give them outright. I have a very slender foot, and any one else utterly spoils the shape of a shoe for me. You can imagine how indignant I was to find Betty's fat hoof in my pet pair. Oh, I did talk!

That of course brought mother's wrath down on me. Not that she could uphold Betty's taking my shoes, but she said I might have spoken more gently to the child and that I was an unnatural sister. That annoyed me for the whole morning, and everything seemed perverse. I was late making the salads for

lunch, and mother was more icy than ever. I wonder if she's always as freezing with dad when they're alone; no wonder the poor darling likes a hot-water bag at nights.

I think it's a puzzle to lots of children whatever their parents married each other for, don't you? I dare say, though, our children will wonder the same. People either grow together or grow apart as they get older, don't they? Maybe there were lots of things they liked about each other at the time.

Anyway, mother was angry about the lunch, and when any one's angry with me, whether they're justified or not, I get miserable. I can't bear a stormy atmosphere; I love everybody round me to be sunny and happy. And, to complete it all, that Mr. Wymondham came round to afternoon tea. I really do think he's the most utter idiot on earth, though he's not bad-looking, if you like English pink and whiteness. But he rubs me the wrong way the whole time, and he will insist on trying to be nice to me—I suppose because I won't. Why mother encourages him beats me; he's *such* an ass. He's an Englishman, with an accent so delicate you think every minute it will catch a cold and die. Mother says his people came over with the Conqueror or somebody, but that seems to me such a silly reason for tolerating a bore; it's nothing to do with him now, he didn't help. I call him the Remittance Man, but not in front of mother.

He's one of the few people I can summon up resolution to snub, but he's such an ass I don't believe

he notices it; even Fred says he's a melon. I stabbed his conceit this afternoon, though, and I don't feel a bit sorry. He was pestering me all the time, and I was bad-tempered to start with. He kept trying to touch my fingers as he took the cups from me, and I got just boiling inside, and once, trying to put my fingers out of his reach, we dropped one of mother's pet cups between us. Mother only gave me a look, and I could have killed him. And even then the silly old thing wouldn't keep away, and finally he said in a low tone:

"Why are you always so cruel to me, Thyme? Do be kind." And I seized my opportunity and laughed cruelly, and looked him up and down with a sweet kind of criticism and said so that every one could hear:

"I think time has done a good deal for you already."

He was *so* angry, for he hates to be thought at all old, though he must be over forty, and he left me alone after that. There is some use in having a silly name at times, isn't there? I can't imagine why they gave Marje and me such idiotic names; the other children are all baptized like Christians.

So you can guess I didn't feel very partified as I dressed, but when I had my chiffon frock on and my hair parted in the middle and done in three coils over my ears and round the back, flat and demure-looking, and the sparkle of temper still in my eyes, I thought perhaps he might like the look of me if he came. "He" was Mr. Gale, of course. Marjoram hates me

when I dress demurely—she says I look more of a young imp than usual; but I love that frock, with its unexpected folds and twists and weeny pink rosebuds peeping at you out of corners.

I didn't see him among the crowd when we got there. We were all out on the balcony, for it was a hot night, and Dolly announced that the first part of the evening was to be a peanut hunt, and told everybody to get their partners. I was in a corner and I squeezed up against the wall. I still felt a bit cantankerous, and I couldn't see Mr. Gale anywhere, and as I'd made up my mind to have him as a partner, I knew I shouldn't be a bit agreeable to any one else. Everybody began pairing off, and I turned my back to one boy I saw coming to me, and still I couldn't see the pig; and then Dr. Philip came and asked me, and I felt so cross I nearly said yes, and just then I saw him standing in the doorway looking around. Of course he might have been looking for Dolly, but somehow way down I felt he wasn't, and I told Dr. Philip I was already promised, and he went away. It wasn't exactly a lie, because I knew we were promised in our own minds.

But still he couldn't see me in the dusk of the balcony, and I wouldn't walk down nearer him where he could see me. I suppose I might have helped him when I knew he was looking for me, but I don't know why; I couldn't. And then he went inside. I felt awful then. I thought he had gone to ask some one else, and I followed the last two or three off the balcony with my heart in my boots. Thyme O'Dea

partnerless! And just inside the threshold of the door stood my lord carefully scanning the group that chattered its way down-stairs and greeting acquaintances. Just as I stepped in I heard a fellow halfway down call up, "Who are you waiting for, Bob?" But he only laughed.

And as soon as I stepped in his whole face lit up in the nicest coziest sort of way, and he calmly stepped beside me and walked down-stairs. He never inquired if I had a partner; he just said:

"I've been looking everywhere for you. Where did you hide yourself?"

"I was on the balcony with the rest," I answered.

"*Were* you?" he said. "I didn't see you, and I looked carefully."

"I saw you," I said.

"Well, you might have given me a sign," he told me reproachfully.

"Well," I said, half-laughing, half-indignant, "how was I to know it was I you were looking for?"

He looked full at me for a minute with his rather big reddy-brown eyes and said softly: "I guess you knew. By the way," he added quickly, "I suppose I *am* your partner—you haven't gone and promised any one else, have you?"

"No, I haven't," I admitted; and he smiled, but so nicely: there was nothing triumphant or self-satisfied about it, he just looked pleased like a boy. I'm certain he's an out-and-out insincere flirt, but he has a most fascinating kind of way with him; he's so boyish at times, he disarms you. I can quite

understand Dolly's being so keen on him. She'll never forgive me for cutting her out. She looked like a little snake when she saw us together; even he noticed it. As we passed out under the rose-porch to the garden he said laughingly:

"Who's in disgrace with Dolly, you or me?"

"Both of us, I fancy," I returned in the same light way.

He didn't say any more about Dolly then, but after a little he remarked:

"If girls had a bit more sense, what a much nicer place the world would be! They like being taken out and a man likes taking them—it's better fun to spend your money with them than alone—but most of them seem to consider, after they've been to tea or the theatre or motoring with you a few times, that they've got a mortgage on your undivided attention."

"You mean," I suggested, "they object to rivals."

"They've no right to consider them rivals," he said, "not so early in the game. Why, only the other—I mean some while ago a girl I used to think rather a jolly sort, and go out with at times, nearly blew the roof off because she saw me at tea with another girl. I never heard anything so ridiculous!"

He looked quite cross.

"Nor I," I agreed. "A girl's got no right to make a fuss about other girls until she's engaged."

He smiled at me whimsically. "I wish most girls thought like you, Miss O'Dea. Now I suppose we'd better see about those peanuts."

Wasn't it lovely? I'm sure he was talking about

Dolly and me. He was so nice. We didn't look for peanuts much. We found one or two plants, and in grabbing them our fingers got tangled ; he has such electric sort of fingers, when he touched mine my cheeks got hot. He tried to flirt though ; I knew he was that sort. I can pretty well size any man up now, but I knew he was the nice sort, or I shouldn't have strolled down to the duck pond with him. Dr. Lawrance, the father, is very proud of his pond—it's really a smallish lake—and he has bronze-wings and pelicans and native companions, and even an old adjutant—it's quite like a zoo.

Bob and I stood leaning on the iron railing looking over, in the shade of the trees, and by and by he slipped one arm along the rail behind me and put the other hand on top of mine on the rail. I didn't see there was any real harm in that, so I let it stop —don't be shocked, G.G.C. ; father confessors must never be shocked, or they won't get the whole truth any more, and your great-grandma is not a prude. I don't think it's wrong to flirt just a wee bit, do you —do you, G.G.C. ?

He talked so nicely. He has a soft melty kind of voice just made for saying things that sound lovely at the time but which aren't worth remembering. I guess he was cut out to be a flirt in his mother's arms, and no one can help his nature, can he ? We talked rather nonsense, but we both enjoyed it. He told me he loved the way I did my hair in those heavy coils ; he said they made my mouth look naughtier than ever. I said " Is it naughty ? "

He laughed like a boy and said "Rather!" and then he said he thought it perfectly fascinating the way my lower lip bulges out in the middle. It does, you know. I don't on earth know why; I think it always looks like a half-pout, but he said you could never take it as that because I had such merry eyes.

And then we got on to names, and he told me his nickname at college was "Copper" Gale. He laughed while he told me and said he used to be thankful it wasn't "Carrots."

"But it really is more copper than red," I assured him, and he only laughed again and said he didn't much mind if it was purple.

"Have you got a nickname?" he asked me. "I know your real name, for I've heard Dolly call you by it."

"Do you know my name?" I said. "I think it's absurd to call a girl a name like that. They used to make awful fun of me at school."

"Did they?" he said. "What a shame," and his voice made the words sound ever so much nicer than that. "I've thought it a lovely name ever since I heard it. But I think if I knew you well enough I should call you Daytime."

"That sounds prettier," I said. "But why?"

"I don't know," he said. "It's how I think of you. You seem to me the sunniest girl I've ever met, you make me think of a morning gallop, with the wind in your ears and the sparkle on the sea."

All this time, you must remember, our heads were close together over the railing and he was playing

with my fingers, and that makes it all sound more convincing.

And when I said we must go back, he asked me for a kiss, and I said no. I hated doing it, but I do think it's over the fence to kiss men you know only so little. I hate kissing anyway ; I think it's stupid. I only do it sometimes because men are so crazy on it. I can't see what there is in it to get so excited about, but since they like it so, it doesn't matter to me one way or the other. It seems so selfish to refuse to give them such a tiny bit of pleasure, don't you think? I don't see any more harm in kissing a man than a girl. It's the way you do it makes it horrid or not. I never let any one kiss me on the mouth—I'm sure it's unhealthy. You know I think there are two kinds of flirting : healthy and unhealthy. The unhealthy is the morbid lead-each-other-on, pretend-it's-the-real-thing kind of sickly sentimentalism, but the other I reckon is just the expression of a kind of joyousness : you both play at love, you make-believe like kids ; you know like they do it isn't real, but it's the most fascinating kind of play. I often think some of the minutes I most like to look back on have been spent flirting with a really nice-minded man, and likewise some of the horridest have been where he's turned out to be a sentimental beast.

But Bob is the healthy sort, like me. He makes love laughing. He wasn't a bit disconcerted by my refusal. His face was grave, but his eyes twinkled.

"Won't you?" he coaxed. "I'd be so good and I want it dreadfully."

"Oh, please no," I said uncomfortably, and I wriggled, for he had both arms lightly round me and was holding me a prisoner. "Wait till we know each other better," I temporized.

"But we never may," he objected. "Suppose we both die in the night. We might," he added in an injured tone as I giggled, "of ptomaine poisoning at supper. Or suppose I'm recalled to Melbourne. Mayn't I?" He drew the tiniest bit closer.

"Oh, please no," I said quickly. "Don't think me horrid, but I—I don't know why I mind so much —I ——"

He let me free in a second and said so nicely, "I beg your pardon; I want my ears boxed. Will you box them?"

He stood there with his head bent ready, looking so repentant I had to laugh, and we walked back as if nothing had happened, but as we got to the supper-room he stopped for a moment.

"I'm a bad boy, Miss O'Dea," he said, so comically one couldn't be serious. "I know it and you know it, but you're not *very* cross with me, are you?"

"I'm not cross at all," I said. "Don't be absurd."

"Then may I see you home?" he said.

"It's only a few streets away," I said, "and there are a lot of us going together, but if you like ——"

"Thank you," he said. "Now I suppose I had better go and make peace with Dolly. I say," in the glare of the room, with that laugh in his eyes he looked more of a boy than ever, "I think you're a brick!" and then he vanished.

Dolly's brow was smoother as she saw Dr. Philip sitting next me at supper. He is very nice, but so cold and polished; he makes me frightened to say a word. I can't make out why he is so polite to me, for he makes me so nervous that when I do open my mouth more than usual silliness comes out; but he listens in the same attentive way he would to another doctor talking about a sigmoidoscope or a sub-mucous. Don't be alarmed at my learnedness, G.G.C. Fred is a first-year medical, and we pick up heaps of words from him we don't know the meaning of. I always say I've got catarrh instead of a cold now; it sounds more imposing and people are *so* sympathetic.

I'm glad I didn't let him kiss me. I wonder if he was offended. I don't think so, because he has asked me to go to lunch with him next time I go shopping. We've fixed for next Thursday. He was a perfect dear too, coming home, kind and sensible. I explained that I don't like kissing, and only do it when I am sorry for people or grateful. I said he had made the evening awfully enjoyable for me, and if he really thought it nasty of me —— But he interrupted quite indignantly and said he'd sooner I offered him sixpence outright than a kiss of gratitude. But those are the only sorts I've ever given yet.

I wonder why I don't like it. Gordon says it's because I've never been kissed by the right person. I wonder? What was it he said about a kiss now? I remember. "A kiss is all the rich beauty of the world packed into one intoxicating second; it is the

dominant chord in the harmony of love; it is the grand heart-throb in the pulse of life; it is poetry and music materialized; it is the maddest, grandest, silliest and most idiotic process in the world." Fancy all that in a kiss! Doesn't Gordon have queer ideas? But I don't think he ever kisses girls, all the same. He never has me, anyway, and I don't think there's anybody he likes better than me. I should be awfully wild if I thought there was. Oh, I'm getting sleepy, and as there's nothing more to tell I think I'll say good-night.

I'm thinking out all sorts of things to say to him at lunch, sensible sorts of things. I suppose he thinks me silly. When I kissed a rose whose head I broke off as I was passing, he said I was the quaintest little girl he'd ever met. I always kiss flowers when I have to throw them away; it seems so cruel before they are quite dead to leave them by themselves all lonely. I think if I were a flower I should feel better if some one said they were sorry when I had to die. It seems so cruel to be flung away when you are no more use.

I'd like him to call me Daytime.

And, do you know, I half wish he'd kissed me. How stupid men are to ask! As if a girl could say yes. Why didn't he do it without asking if he wanted to? I believe I shouldn't have minded. What a shameless brat I am, but I'm only talking to my privatest self. Yes, I think I wish he had. Only to see what it was like, of course.

But he is nice.

CHAPTER VIII

ADA AND VANE

ADA is a rummy kid; she's frightfully unlike the rest of us—at least I suppose she's something after the same pattern as Marje, but not so snappy in her manner. She's awfully self-willed and decided where her opinions are concerned, and her opinions on things are often too funny for words.

She and I are getting rather friendly. I suppose it's because she's grown up—at least she has put up her hair—but she hasn't come out yet, and, what's more, she says she won't, the social side of life doesn't appeal to her, she says. We often talk things over now about society and men and that sort of thing. We don't agree on anything, but we try to consider each other's point of view a bit, and really Ada will be a nice girl in a year or two, when she has had some of her priggishness knocked out of her. She makes me feel like a sermon does, although I'm nearly four years older.

Why, I'm an old woman beside Ada!

But her ideas on men especially are the limit. Still, as I tell her when she hints that she considers me fast, four years out like I've had will alter her point of view a heap. She says it won't, but she doesn't know what she's talking about. Of course I

was never as prim as Ada, but still, when I was her age, I'd a lot of illusions left. But Ada's all illusions, and I'm sorry for her, for she'll get hurt when they start busting up, unless she doesn't see it. I think some people don't see them fade; they can't feel quickly enough—maybe Ada's like that.

She puzzles me at times. What a lot of thought I'm giving to a mere sister, and she wouldn't be grateful if she knew either. But I'm beginning to think I really like Ada, I mean apart from her being a sister. Of course one feels sisterly to one's sisters because they are so, but I mean in some ways now I like Ada for herself. We had a yarn to-night after dinner on the lawn. I was sprawling on the grass looking up at the stars, and Ada was sitting on a chair beside me. I was giving her a jab or two about Vane Haste, and she got quite offended and dignified. She has very serious big eyes, and she turned them on me and said :

"I don't think you ought to talk like that, Thyme. I can't bear people being silly."

"My sweet sister," I said, "silliness is half the joy of life."

"Well, I don't like it," she replied in her decided way.

"But you like him, don't you?" I asked. "He's absolutely mad about you." I love teasing Ada.

"I wish you wouldn't say such things," she said vexedly. "You oughtn't to tell me."

"Why not?" I pursued, enjoying myself. "He makes no secret of it, he told me so, and he wants

me to tell you. You see he hasn't the courage himself."

"Hasn't he?" Ada said indignantly, and then bit her lip as I laughed at drawing her. But the situation is really a joke. I know it sounds an extraordinary thing to say about a member of our family, but Ada has never had a boy before. Those that come to the house are nice to her, of course, but she is rather quiet until you know her well, and always seems to make a background for the other two kids. No one till now has sought her out especially; I suppose that is why we are all so interested. Besides Ada has her work. She is a kindergarten teacher, and is crazy about it. She has not long been through her course, and I suppose always working and studying has helped to keep her mind off men, she is so absorbed in her children. She's very clever at it too, they say.

But about a fortnight ago a couple of Mrs. Haste's nephews from Melbourne came to stay with her. They are only kids about nineteen—at least I think Micky is twenty—but they are only youngsters, and such dears. I have seen more of them than the rest of the family because I go such a lot to Hastes'. Of course I'm no interest to them, I'm far too old—their taste, as Vane ingenuously confessed, still runs to flappers and those lately emancipated from flapperhood—but we get on well. They love to tease me. They think I am Gordon's girl, and poor little Mrs. Haste gets so distressed and annoyed. Gordon and I have to laugh—we can't help it; but I don't think

Gordon minds anyway, and I'm sure I don't. I've had two brothers to break me in to teasing. And they are too big to remonstrate with. They are too thin yet, and need to fill out a lot to look big, but they are both six-footers. One day when I did tell Vane what I thought of his behavior, he picked me up and gently dropped me out of the window.

But I've got the joke back on him now, for he's head over heels in love with Ada. It all happened in a second, as soon as he set eyes on her. If they were a bit older it would be delightfully romantic, but at their ages it is absurd, besides Ada isn't a bit impressed. But I'm enjoying it, for Vane confides in me, thinking I'm of a sympathetic disposition, and Micky and Ada both furnish scraps of enlightenment.

Micky is immensely tickled about it. He is really more boyish than Vane, although he is the elder. He's one of those nice flirty-natured sort of boys who like nearly every girl they meet and whom nearly every girl likes, and he has very pretty manners. He'll be simply charming in a few years. But Vane somehow gives one the impression of being more solid—in fact in some ways he's rather like Gordon. Perhaps that's why I like him a wee bit more than Micky, although I liked Micky best at first. No, I believe I like them about the same—comparisons are horrid, aren't they? But Vane needs getting used to. He has such a funny abrupt manner; even with Ada he's the same. She couldn't understand him at first.

The other night he wanted her to go to the pictures—it was the day after I introduced them—and Ada told me afterward that she nearly had a fit at the way he asked her. He said, after fidgeting a bit, "Are you going to the pictures next week?"

Ada said, "I felt such a fool, Thyme, for I knew he was trying to ask me, so I said, 'I haven't thought about it.' And then he said, 'You can go next Monday.' And I felt a bigger ass than ever, so I just said vaguely, 'Thanks.' But he wanted to clinch the matter, so after a big effort he blurted out, 'Will you come?' And of course, when he put it as bluntly as that, I couldn't retort with a blunt 'No,' could I?"

And she slapped me because I winked!

But she wouldn't go unless Micky went too, so I suggested he should take Fay. Ada and propriety were thus appeased. She doesn't encourage him much, and that's a fact, but Vane is pretty tenacious, though I should never have thought Ada would be the sort of girl to take his fancy—she is so quiet, and he is, too, rather. Ada says he is hard to talk to and there are long gaps in the conversation, but every day Vane tells me what a bonza girl she is. I suppose it's really that has made me look Ada over again, but she gets quite wild when I tell her how much he likes her, although I'm sure she's secretly pleased.

She wouldn't be a girl if she wasn't.

But she isn't used to such situations, and I think she hates to admit she's slipping off her pedestal of

disdain ever so little. But it gives us a laugh now and again.

How slowly old time goes! I wish it was Thursday. I wonder what Mr. Gale is doing now. I wonder if he's thinking of me at all. I don't suppose he is. Perhaps he's round at Dolly's. I wish I knew him better; I wonder if I ever will. I did wish he could have been here this afternoon when I saw Vane gazing adoringly at Ada.

I must be an ill-natured beast. I hate seeing other people adored when I happen to have no one myself.

CHAPTER IX

MAX'S MOTHER

HELLO, great-grandchildren, here I am again!

You can't have a very long letter to-day, because I simply must write a letter to Max in a minute. Bother that boy! I wonder if he is really as fond of me as he makes out, but I don't guess so, he always did talk nonsense. I dare say he has half a dozen girls in the West.

I've another piece of news for you, G.G.C.: your great-aunt Marjoram has just become engaged to Petermac. I suppose I don't sound very excited over the first engagement in the house, but neither she nor Petermac is the sort to encourage excitement, and besides it's several days old now.

I feel the teeniest bit worried about it at times. I don't think Marje is wildly happy, but she'll get lots fonder of him as it goes on—most engaged people do that, I've noticed. Why, if they have a long engagement, those that start out with being rather in love with each other become positively unbearable by their wedding-day. Besides, he adores her, and if she doesn't care for anybody else, what more can a woman want? She said to me the other morning, with the funniest look when I said something of the sort to her, "Oh, well, I've done my duty to the

family," and she won't say anything more. Sometimes I think there *must* be some one else, but I've run through every man who ever came to the house, and not one could possibly fit. Besides, I suppose he doesn't love her, or she wouldn't take Petermac, and what's the use of loving a man who doesn't love you?

Anyway, he's given her the loveliest ring, emeralds and diamonds, and he does anything she wants, so she ought to be happy. She's not the sentimental, romantic sort; I don't think any of our family are. We've all got just a grain of mother in us to leaven dad's soft-heartedness. I was terribly romantic in my teens. I used to revel in rarefied courtships and elopements and all the eighteenth century frill, knee-breeches and powder and buckles and all. I used to think an elopement would be just gorgeous. I asked Gordon once if he'd like to elope with me, but he said he didn't think so. I pointed out he couldn't possibly tell till he'd tried, but he wasn't convinced.

But now I'm older I'm terribly practical. You can't be romantic once you really think about things and watch how they turn out with your friends. Romance is two blind eyes, Ignorance and Imagination; that's why it is so foolhardy. Romance is for novels, not for life, like Bohemia and heaven. Bohemia's sweet in theory, but you can never localize it. I don't believe it ever existed; it's just a "blether" of the poets, their land of El Dorado—in fact, the artistic heaven—and to try to materialize

the life there is as disappointing as it would be to go sightseeing in an actual golden street with milk and honey running in the gutters.

When you are a young girl, love and marriage and things like that are things you think of with the gloves on, as it were; they catch the blush glow of your first feeling of being in love with life. But when you get older and watch other people's marriages, and think over it—I suppose it's sensible to face facts—your happiness is likely to be more lasting if it takes everydayness into account, but it isn't quite so intense and absorbed. When you are a schoolgirl you never get past the wedding-day; it just seems the acme and apotheosis of love's young dream, and you never think of anything but your dress and his kisses—and you find out later it's mostly bread and butter and the price of meat and nurses.

What nonsense I'm talking! But thinking of Marje has set me off, and besides I've just washed my hair. I want it to be nice and fluffy for to-morrow, when I go to lunch with Mr. Gale. I shall wear my voile with the blue spots, I think. I always have some blue about me on account of my eyes. Gordon once told me a girl who could match her eyes in her dress could upset any man's equilibrium. I wonder will I upset Bob's? I wonder does he really like me, or will it be another girl next week?

You know I always want to moralize when I wash my hair, it makes me look so ugly for an hour or two. All the color seems to draw out of my face,

and when I've no color I look hideous. Really, I look downright horrible to-day; for two pins I'd redden my lips. I shall to-morrow anyway if they don't look better. Talking of painting, I had a joke yesterday on Mr. Wymondham. He rather fancies himself an artist, and he's asked me more than once to let him do my portrait. And yesterday he said again:

"Thyme, I should like to paint your face."

I couldn't resist the temptation, and I answered innocently: "Would you really? It would save me a lot of trouble, but do you think you could do it better than I? Your own shows a bit at times, you know." He could just have murdered me, for he does make up a bit to try and appear younger. But isn't it funny the way some people go on about painting? I don't do it really because I don't need it, but if I did I would like a shot. Of course girls who have a nice skin naturally can afford to sneer, and those who won't, on principle, sniff because they are jealous, knowing the other girls aren't really any better underneath, though they look it, and men laugh about it for want of something better, but they marry them just the same and sooner than the sallow girls who won't. Good reason too! The girl who takes a pride in her appearance is likely to take a pride in her home. The sallow girl may well turn out a slattern. A nice girl can hoodwink a man even if she's plain and if she's actually pretty—a man never minds what a pretty girl says to him, because he never credits her with brains enough to make the rudeness intentional.

I feel so absurdly restless, I don't know what to do. Good gracious, one would think I'd never been to lunch before, the way I keep on thinking about it. I wish he'd ring up to-day. I haven't seen or heard from him since that night at Dolly's. But I dare say he's out with other girls. Did I tell you Dolly came round yesterday? She said she wanted to play tennis, but she kept talking about him in between the sets, though she didn't get any change out of me. I may be a fool, as the family say, but I can hold my tongue if I don't want to talk. She beat me two sets running, though. I shall have to practice a bit more. I hate being beaten by Dolly.

I think I'd better stop, I'm talking rot. It's too hot to go to town, and Maida has gone up the line with Peterjohn for the day. I'd go in next door and cheer up Mrs. Haste, but I'm afraid I shall let myself in for another veiled lecture about Gordon. She's the darlingest old lady, and very queenly and very proper. She always dresses in grey and she has soft grey eyes. She likes me in a kind of disapproving way, if you can understand. I think she's fond of me, as it were, against her better judgment.

I think she is sorry Max likes me, but since he does she tries to discourage my affections from settling on any one else. You see she worships Max. I have to laugh at times; she daren't say anything to Gordon point-blank, so lately she has taken to giving me veiled lectures on the virtues of fidelity.

It's all I can do to keep a straight face sometimes

when I'm helping her roll her wool, as demure as demure can be; but oh! she is so transparent. Sometimes when she holds forth on Gordon and his instability compared with Max, who according to her is of the "there's only one girl in the world for me" variety, I just long for some one to share the joke with. Besides, isn't it silly of mothers to explain their sons to their girl friends? The girls know heaps more about the average son than their mothers ever will, and occasionally it's very hard not to smile at what the mothers think about their paragons. Mrs. Haste would have a fit if I told her some things I could about her beloved Max.

A few weeks ago she confided in me that she was sure Gordon would die a bachelor. I sweetly agreed. I agree with everything she says now, and that brings her to the end of her resources, for you can't have a discussion of one. But now she has changed round. Considering Gordon has been at our house almost every day for a fortnight, I was expecting a change of tactics. Her theory now is that he'll fall suddenly and violently in love with some girl on first meeting her—some day in the far future of course, very, very far. I agreed again that it was most likely, but she didn't look satisfied even then.

Isn't she a trick?

Well, I must go again. Ada is calling me to hook up her frock—she and Vane are off to the theatre. It took a frightful lot of persuasion on my part to get her to go with him alone, for Fay, who was to have made a four with Micky, went away to spend the

week-end up-country and threw over the arrangement, and Micky declared he wasn't going to play gooseberry, and I couldn't step in, for Gordon and I are going rinking. Vane owes me a lot. I say all sorts of nice things to Ada about him, but I think he is grateful; he tells me every day I am a true sport.

That is his highest compliment.

He is beginning to think gloomily of the end of his holiday. He and Micky are going on the land together, that is why they are having this long holiday first. They are cousins, not brothers, I suppose I should explain, and most tremendous pals; they have been ever since they were about ten.

Micky and I are quite interested in Vane's little love affair. Micky can afford to be superior, for he hasn't struck a girl here to beat the little girl in Melbourne as Vane has. He tells me all about her, and to-day he read me some of a letter he got from her. He says he will send me her photo when he gets back to Melbourne to show me what a little peach she is.

Kids are quaint.

I wonder if I was as funny when I was nineteen.

CHAPTER X

AN AWFUL FOOL

OH! I do feel miserable. I've been the most *awful* fool. It's all my temper again. I've got a beast when it really starts, and I've smashed up everything. Mr. Gale will never speak to me again, never. I don't care about that—not much, anyway, but it's what he must be thinking of me. He must think me the rudest, most shameless, ill-tempered —— Oh, dear! every time I think of what he must be thinking I get hot all over. I could never look him in the face again if I did meet him. Why don't I stop and count ten or something when I am mad?

I can't tell a soul about it either, not even Maida, but I can write it, somehow, because it does relieve my mind to put it down. And it all happened so simply too. Great-grandchildren, have you ever done things you feel ashamed of afterward? If you haven't I don't think I can tell you, but I'm sure you must have—that is, if you're my great-grandchildren.

It started with the lunch. You remember I told you I was going to lunch with him. I went and enjoyed it immensely. We had it at Holland House, and we saw several people we knew. Nearly every

man there seemed to know him, and he was perfectly charming. He told me yarns about his college days —he went to Scotch, so Micky and Vane would approve of him ; they have both just left—and he spoke of his people—he has only one brother and two sisters—and about when he was at the 'Varsity how, by judicious insinuation, he had induced a boy and girl to believe the other was in love with each, and how the boy, who was shy, under repeated urgings from him, at last attempted to be tender to her, and was rewarded by a slap on the cheek. He really was a darling, and I laughed and laughed ; the hour flew by like a minute.

And now the tragic part begins.

When we said good-bye we arranged to meet the next night at the Coles's moonlight euchre—at least, when I say "arranged to meet," I don't mean we fixed it quite as bluntly as that, but he said he would be there although he hadn't intended going, and I did likewise. We both understood perfectly without saying so that we were to meet each other, and that, except for that, neither of us would probably go.

Well, he didn't turn up.

Wouldn't you have been mad? I was anyway. It was the stupidest party I ever was at. Even Gordon wasn't there ; he had to work at the last minute. I was bored to tears, and I could have murdered Bob Gale, but I reflected, when at last the thing came to an end, that perhaps some business had come in at the last minute that simply *had* to be attended to that night, and he would probably ring

me up in the morning and explain. All the same, Marjoram said I was like a bear with a sore head going home, and I certainly felt it.

And next morning he didn't ring up, *nor the next afternoon, nor the next.* And I got madder and madder and furiouser. And he didn't the next day, nor the *next*, nor the *next.* And with my indignation boiling and simmering with the lid on, and not being able even to tell Maida—it seems such a humiliating sort of thing to confess a man slipped you up and never bothered to apologize—oh! you can't guess how angry and outraged I felt. It seemed as if he thought me just a bit of nothing he could make a fuss over one day and ignore the next as it suited him, as if I didn't count at all. I don't think my pride has ever smarted like that before.

I know you're thinking I might have given him the credit of believing he had written and the letter had gone astray. I did think of that, but it won't hold water, because if I had got an apology from him I should have let him know it didn't matter, and if he had written and found his letter ignored, any sensible man would ring up and find if it had been received. No, he just dropped me completely, and when I went round to Coles's and found out diplomatically that they had had a hurried note excusing his absence by press of business, I felt I could have screamed in front of them.

I stood it eight whole days, and it spoiled everything I did. We went to the Crystal Palace one night—Gordon and Marje and Petermac and I—and

I couldn't take any interest in a single thing, not even the fortune-telling. If I did start to get interested, the horrid business would flash across my mind again, and I'd get silent and wretched. I felt what was the use of being pleased when men are nice to you if they could turn round as suddenly as that? I wondered if perhaps I had been too friendly and nice at lunch, and he thought me too easily won. But I never can pretend not to like people when I do, any more than I can pretend to like them when I don't. Besides, I think it's stupid to be always masking your feelings. Why shouldn't one be natural? Why should we pretend?

"Etiquette," you say. Etiquette be d——, but it isn't etiquette to say so. We are all so very afraid of making fools of ourselves. Gordon says, if we only realized it, Nature has done it for most of us already. Mankind is two sorts, solemn fools and merry fools, and give him the merry fool any day. We are so weighed down by our serious conception of ourselves, of our importance in the scheme of things, as if we counted, with our puny loves and hates. Love, hate, laugh, cry, he says, as the spirit moves you, and the world will sympathize. People who sneer at abandon are mostly jealous of it.

Gordon says it's this paralyzing solemnity he hates most. We are afraid to let ourselves go, afraid to show our affection too plainly lest people should presume on it or misconstrue its temperature, afraid to commit ourselves to action for fear we change our opinion later on. Fear! The world is ruled by

fear. Say, say, say, Gordon urges, and, if you want to later, unsay just as frankly.

Perhaps that's why he likes me, because I never pretend.

I wonder if Bob did think I seemed to like him too easily. Oh, dear! it is hard being a woman. If I'd been ungrateful and nasty to him, perhaps he'd be running after me now. But I can't be horrid to anybody; I only wish I could. I *can't* help liking everybody who seems to like me just out of a sort of gratitude.

Even at night I couldn't get away from the horrible feeling of being despised, and by the eighth day I couldn't stand it any longer. If he was going to drop me without another word, I'd give him something to remember me by. When my temper reaches boiling point, which honestly it seldom does, for even the family admit I'm pretty good-natured, but when it does, I can give people vitriol, especially on paper—even then I find it hard to speak it. And I wrote him a note. I feel a kind of melancholy pride in it even now. It was just biting, though exquisitely polite. Roughly it was something to the effect that, as he didn't seem to have enough grace to keep his appointments or courtesy to apologize for the lack of it, I regretted I would be obliged to discontinue his acquaintance, or something like that.

I'm not sure that that was exactly it, but oh! it must have made him writhe. If he didn't like me, I made up my mind he should detest me. He was

going to see if I was a meek worm that could be trampled on. I had a sting.

I hated him—I just hated him. I got a kind of satisfaction out of writing the note, but when I had posted it I felt more miserable than before, because I didn't want him to hate me really and I had cut myself off for good now. Then I wondered how he'd answer it or if he'd answer it at all. I know I shouldn't have. I wondered though what excuse he could give. I thought of every reason I could, but none of them were real excuses. Even if he was busy he could surely spare a second to come to the telephone.

And then he didn't answer my letter at least for four days. I had begun to think he wouldn't at all then, and I used to lie in bed in the mornings and just think when I met him in town how I'd wither him with a look, tilt my chin up to a haughty angle and cut him dead. I practiced it before the glass, but I never saw him in town. And then the awfullest part was that Dolly Lawrance gave me several horrid little prods about him; of course she didn't know we'd quarreled and I didn't enlighten her. She'll be as pleased as pleased when she does know, as I suppose she will some time. The only comfort I've got is she hasn't seen him either. She says Dr. Philip says he's working like six men and is worried about something.

I wonder if it's me? Serve him right if it is. Oh, I do wish he hadn't been horrid; we could have been such jolly friends. I know we could.

But I haven't finished telling you yet, there's a lot more. I hope it doesn't sound silly and trivial. I

suppose, as a matter of fact, it is, but the consequences aren't anyway; the biggest things of your life seem to hang on the tiniest at times. It was only just a chance that dad happened to stand for Parliament, the member who for years had been sent in by our district went away to England. Dad had never dreamed of going in for politics, and if the Liberal agent hadn't persuaded him one day we might have been back-blockers still, and I mightn't have known Gordon, or Dolly, or Maida, or anybody. Well, in that case I wouldn't have met Mr. Gale, and that would have been some comfort.

But I was telling you on the fourth day I had a letter from him, and I suppose it was because I'd given up hope, but I trembled all over in the queerest way when I got it. And when I'd read it I wished I were buried, I felt the most utter beast ever born. His letter was cold and dignified too, but I could see he was awfully hurt. He said:

"DEAR MISS O'DEA:

"I received your note last Tuesday and regret that I have been unable to spare a moment to answer it before. I was very sorry that it was not possible for me to put in an appearance at the party. I would explain the circumstances to you, but as you have quite decided that you do not wish to continue my acquaintance it is not worth wasting your time.

"Yours sincerely,

"ROBERT HEATHNESS GALE."

I have been an unreasonable wretch, haven't I? I might have remembered men have other things to

think of besides girls, worries and responsibilities we haven't, and he might really have been unable to ring up. Anyway I felt an unutterable cad, and I found a million excuses for him although he hadn't put forward one himself. But that was what I liked the best about it; away down at the very bottom of them, though they'll never admit it, women rather like men taking the high hand with them. It was a nice straightforward note too, wasn't it? But I hate him all the same even now.

You see, I felt so upset that on the spur of the minute I flew to the telephone and rang him up at his office. But it wasn't much good, the wires were terribly bad that day and we could hardly hear each other, and he said there was a terrific noise going on at his end and I heard him savagely tell some one to "shut up" once. He didn't sound amiable. But I dashed right into the breach; when I climb down I climb down. But oh! a telephone that won't "tell" is a curse.

I made him understand at length it was me speaking, and he said "Yes" so coldly I nearly dropped the receiver and fled, but I stuck to it. I made him understand I'd got his letter—all this amid a deafening buzz and repeated "sorries" and "beg pardons"—and he said "Yes" again, and I said that I was a beast and was sorry, and of course he didn't catch it, and thought I said *he* was a beast, and we got too mixed for anything, so he said he'd ring up next day when the wires were better.

I do wish I hadn't such a tender conscience. I

always jump from one extreme to the other, and it never occurred to me he hadn't explained anything yet, and I didn't know any more why he hadn't apologized. Somehow just his voice through the telephone made me feel there had been nothing to be cross about, and it was all my fault. So I wrote him another letter that night, an awfully nice one, explaining just why I had been mad with him and what I had thought he must be thinking of me, and how he had hurt my pride, and that I was sorry for my temper, and was sure he had some good reason for his silence, and if he really wanted to be friends again I would go out with him when he liked. I'm not very good at explaining myself nicely; I just blurt out exactly what's in my mind without thinking how it may sound to any one else. Still, it's done now. And then I felt happier than I'd done since the party. I don't know why on earth I am so silly over him.

I got the darlingest letter back the next afternoon; he must have written almost the minute he got mine. He said it was just sweet of me to have written him such a frank, kind letter, because it did look as if he had rather deserved a little indignation, but if I cared to hear anything further about him he would explain. I'll copy out the explaining part, otherwise I can't make you see how nicely he put it. He says:

"And now for the reason of the behavior that so annoyed you. I'm afraid a woman may be just as vexed at the explanation as the offense, but a man

would understand—it was business. This is a busy season and I am up to my ears in work; while I write this there are clerks coming in every few minutes for directions. You see, Miss O'Dea, I know you think me a rather frivolous person, but I do take business seriously. I'm my father's representative here, and in my own smaller way am as responsible for the success of the firm and its name as he is, and he trusts me to make good. A position like mine at certain seasons doesn't only require a man's time but his very thoughts, and although for a couple of days after the party I remembered once or twice I ought to ring you up, I honestly hadn't a second to call my own, and after that the pressure was so great it even—try to forgive me—drove you out of my head altogether. This sounds terribly rude I know, but I'm telling you the plain truth; and if you had seen the way I've been slaving till after eleven every night you would understand and forgive me. Added to it all, my father had a stroke a week ago, and as the doctors at first thought it was serious I had to make a flying trip to Melbourne, which still further disorganized the office.

"I hope you believe I would not willingly be discourteous to you for a great deal. I see no hope of having any free time before the end of next week, but if I can see any chance of a night off I will ring you up and see if we can't arrange something. And there was no need for you to apologize about your writing. I read it quite easily coming over in the ferry this morning. I assure you I have had letters

from girls which all the ferry trips in the world would fail to decipher."

It was a dear letter, don't you think? I do still. I felt ridiculously happy till the end of the next week, though I did think once or twice he might have spared a second to ring up. But he didn't; and he hasn't yet, although it's the middle of the week after that. I think he's a beast. I suppose he doesn't really want to see me again any more; but all the same, I reckon out of sheer politeness he ought to ask me out once more, especially as I said I'd go. I just blush whenever I think of it. I am so thoughtless, I didn't mean to invite myself at all; all I meant was I'd like to see him again if only to tell him I was sorry for our misunderstanding; but of course I must go and put it bluntly that I'd go out with him if he liked. I don't want him to take me out, there are plenty of others; I do put things so awfully, and perhaps he thinks I'm keen on it and that's why he doesn't care about taking me.

Oh! I could just drown myself. I wish he was dead. He's nothing but a shallow nasty flirt. You remember in his letter he said he had often had letters from girls. Perhaps he tells them all he feels they could be friends and then drops them dead.

Oh, I could—could *bite* him!

Even if he does ring up now I couldn't possibly go out with him, could I? And it's such a pity because we *could* have been friends, I know.

CHAPTER XI

ALWAYS BEYOND

I'M afraid I was rather hot the last time I scribbled, but of course it hurts one's pride to be dropped suddenly and completely; not that it matters in the least to me whether I ever see him again, except that I should like to have the chance of giving him a glorious and complete snub that would show him exactly how much I think of him and his paltry friendships. I wish I'd known as much about him when we first met as I do now, I'd have shown him there was one girl he couldn't hoodwink; but I didn't, and he's done it. I suppose he thinks all girls are easy game to him.

It's just maddening. Of course I have neither seen nor heard from him again. At least, to be quite honest, I have seen him. It was in George Street. I was standing in the Arcade waiting for Marje and I saw him coming. He was frowning a little and hurrying along as if his life depended on getting nowhere in particular in less time than it takes to say it. If I had stepped out a little in the street, as I could easily have done, he could not have helped seeing me, but I wasn't going to force myself on his notice since he chose to forget me, and I drew back in the Arcade. He raced on, looking

neither to the right nor the left, like an allegorical Christian, and he didn't see me.

It's rather humiliating to admit it, but I believe right at the bottom of my heart I felt sneakingly sorry he somehow hadn't caught sight of me. I wonder I haven't got more pride. But I do wonder too why he is sick of me. I haven't done anything. Of course I was nasty about that letter, but I apologized, and what can one do more? Besides, I think I had some excuse. Not that it really matters, but I've never been dropped before, and I suppose I can't get used to the sensation.

However, that's quite enough about it.

But sometimes, when I think of the way his eyes smiled down at the Lawrances' pond, I wonder how he can.

I was up at Maida's this afternoon. Of course she knows a bit about it because she is my greatest pal, but no one else knows anything. Betty gives me an occasional prod about my Storm-man, but she doesn't know it's all off, fortunately for me. Maida says there may be reasons we can't guess, he may be busy. But still, a fortnight! Even Maida gives it up.

All the same she soothes my injured pride. There's nothing like a pal, is there? I don't know what Maida and I would do without each other, we've been inseparables ever since we were thirteen and were put to sit together in school. I took a fancy to her the first day when I heard her cheek the teacher. Maida could cheek more innocuously than any other girl, because she was such a little fragile-

looking thing and had a most disarming lisp. She does it still when she's excited. We were reading Lamb's Tales from Shakespeare and I forget exactly what she said, something outrageous anyway, and Miss Harriet told her not to be saucy, and Maida lisped back with the most protesting hurt look—we all used to practice that look at the glass in lunch hour—"But, Mitharriet, we alwayth have thauth with lamb at home."

She got a hundred lines for it, but the whole class thought her a heroine, and I adored her from that minute. We've never had a quarrel in our lives. We always make a point of not getting angry with each other even if we seem to have cause. If we seem rude or neglect each other for weeks, the neglected one, if inclined to feel sniffy, says to herself, "I expect she's got a good reason, wait and see before you get mad," and of course there always is a reason and so we don't get mad.

And it doesn't matter a bit if we don't meet for weeks. If our engagements happen to keep us apart, as they sometimes do now Maida's married, we go to each other after it perfectly convinced—in fact without its occurring to us we need to be convinced—that each will be wildly interested in all the tiniest things that have happened to the other.

And we know almost everything about each other too. We read each other's letters always. Maida used to let me read Jack's even, and the others before Jack, and I've showed her mine ever since we began to get letters at all. You see we understand

each other so perfectly there's never any need to explain or to wonder if what one thinks touching will appear funny to the other. That's how we could read our love-letters together. When Jack called her the sweetest little angel in all the world, and said he was counting every minute to the feel of her soft little cheek on his own again, I didn't think it absurd at all—I was as pleased as Maida. And she is just the same with me. If Maida went back on me I'd never believe in anything or anybody again. But of course she won't.

That darling imp Peterjohn behaved like a Turk to-day. First the little wretch woke up when he ought to have been asleep, and yelled for his Thyme to nurse him, which for the sake of peace she did, though Maida cruelly said, "Let him yell; it's only temper."

Anyway, I didn't. I dressed him in a clean frock and cuddled him, and he was as good as gold for a bit. I do love the way a baby laughs, as if his face had a sudden crack in it. Maida says I spoil him, and if I had him all day like she has I wouldn't be so fond of nursing him; and I was inclined to agree with her later on, when he got bad-tempered again and yelled and yelled. We banished him to nurse. Mustn't it be rotten for mothers who can never get rid of their babies even for a wee while? When I see a woman in a tram or a shop with a crying baby I always feel I couldn't bear to marry a really quite poor man.

I wish you could see the darling, though, when he

gurgles at me. I believe I love you more than Maida does, Peterjohn. I wonder if when you're a grown-up man your naughty blue eyes will coax their way under a girl's lashes and you will tell her she's the quaintest little girl you ever met—and then forget she ever existed. I should think he must have been a baby like Peterjohn, with just the same face-splitting smile. I wonder if his mother ever thought what a pig he would grow up. I do hope Peterjohn will always be nice to girls.

Gordon has been such a dear to me lately. He seems to be getting nicer somehow. He doesn't tease me as much, and sometimes he looks at me almost like other men. If it wasn't Gordon and too absurd to think of, for he says he'll never lose his head over a woman, I'd really think he cared a bit; but it must be just imagination.

I think life is horrid all round. Fay and I had to pick quarts and quarts of black currants for jam this morning, and my hands look as if they'd been dipped in purple ink—it simply *won't* come off; and I have to go shopping, and I don't want to; and I tore my new muslin on the door of the motor yesterday; and I had a letter from Max. He is getting stupider, and it's very aggravating of him; he's got no right to assume I like him just because he's fond of me. It's very conceited of him, and even if I did care a bit once perhaps, it doesn't mean I'm going to always, especially when he's away all the time, and he ought to have sense enough to know it. And Mrs. Haste asked me if I had had a letter to-

day, and I said "Yes" before I thought, and then found out she hadn't, and I know she was angry, and she could have his old letter for all I care.

Gordon is the only nice person I know. Marjoram is getting silenter than ever since her engagement, and Petermac takes up every spare minute of her time. And just fancy! one of my very nicest boys has gone and transferred his affections to Fay. She is a thousand times prettier than I, I know—she is going to be the family beauty—but her hair is still down; I think it's so queer the fancies grown-up men sometimes take for flappers.

I suppose it's ridiculous of me to mind, but it really is annoying to be cut out by your younger sister, even if she is welcome to him. It gives you such a shock to find all of a sudden there are more women in the family where you thought there were only kids. He is taking her to the theatre to-night, and Betty is so unpleasant about it—that's why, I suppose, I mind. She crows about it as if it were her own triumph. I suppose she feels it's the triumph of her faction. There have always been two sets in our house, as is natural: the grown-ups (us) and the kids.

Gordon and I are going with them, as Fay is too young to be allowed to go alone. He's getting quite gay the way he flies to amusements now; he used to be a perfect old hermit—wouldn't go anywhere. We went down on the beach last night for a bit. I love the beach summer nights, don't you? You could hardly tell which was sky and which harbor, the lights and stars looked so alike. Gordon told me

stories about troubadours and Crusaders. He knows the most wonderful fascinating tales; when he gets started I could listen for hours and hours. You are never dull with Gordon.

He was telling me last night about the birth and growth of French poetry; he likes it better than English. He is partly French, you know. Some Meryon among his ancestors was frightfully clever and distinguished as a scientist or doctor or something. I wish I could understand it, but I've forgotten even what they taught me at school, and that wasn't much. I thought it hateful then, but Gordon seems to have the knack of drawing a portrait for you in about three words, and he gives you the quaintest little anecdotes to remember them by; and he often quotes bits to me too, not that I can understand them, but they sound musical and he tells me what they mean. He has just the voice for saying poetry. One thing he wrote down for me; I wanted to keep it. Have you ever seen it, great-grandchildren? It sounds so prettily melancholy when Gordon says it, or perhaps it was the sea and the moonlight. The poet lived in Champagne hundreds of years ago and was exiled to Brittany, and he hears there the birds he used to hear singing in his beloved Champagne, and he cries:

Les oise les de mon pays
Ai oïs en Bretagne,
A lors chant m'est il bien avis
Qu'en la douce Champagne
Les oïs jadis.

I wonder is it as sweet as Gordon made it sound to me?

Sometimes I tell him he must be a relation of Merlin, the way he bewitches me. When he gets going on things like that I would sooner be with him than anybody; I suppose it is because I am so ignorant. I never even tried to learn at school, and I left as soon as the family would let me. I never knew that history and literature could ever possibly be interesting, or I might have tried to learn, but when Gordon talks them they're better than a novel.

And the night helped us too. We just step out of our back gate on to the beach, you know. The sand is beautiful at night, the little weed-bushes on the sand-hills look as if they were half-buried in glittering snow, and the moon lays a carpet of white across the sea for lovers to walk on over to Arcady that always lies just—beyond.

Oh! great-grandchildren, always just—beyond.

Have you found it so too?

CHAPTER XII

FRIENDSHIP OR MARRIAGE?

THOSE kids will be the death of me. What do you think I did to-day?—went to tea in town with them, to chaperone Ada, of course. I never thought I'd descend to playing gooseberry to one of the triplets, but Vane begged me to come, he said Ada wouldn't unless I did. Even the suggestion of Fay wouldn't move her. She evidently has a greater idea of my respectability than I thought she had—besides, Micky is very entertaining, and I wasn't bored really. I should mind being seen with some boys that age, but they are both such dears, and so big too, they look older. It's funny how relative difference in age is after all. I mean it would be absurd for a girl of twenty-two to have much to do with kids of nineteen, but if I were to meet them when they are twenty-five and I twenty-eight we should be on a level, especially if we didn't know.

It's the same with Ada and me. We are both grown up now and on the same footing, and I have to revolutionize my whole attitude toward her, for I have been grown up for years, while she was still a mere schoolgirl who didn't count. Time by himself produces more humorous situations than any

one else; here, for instance, we two at tea together. A year ago I'd have laughed at the mere idea.

But in a way I see a good deal of the boys. You see it is their first visit to Sydney, and Mrs. Haste wants them to see all there is, and as Gordon is away so much, she takes them about herself, and she gets me to go with her half the time to keep her company and make it livelier for them, for Ada is no use; she can't get away from her kindergarten till late in the afternoon. I get quite a deal of amusement out of it too, for they are a lively pair, but poor Mrs. Haste gets so wild when they tease me about Gordon.

Yesterday we went to Manly for the afternoon. The boys wanted a bathe, so I went in too—it was a gorgeous day—and then we sat on the sand a while and browned ourselves. I never burn, so I don't mind how much I sit in the sun, and there were not many people there. I showed the boys how to cross out their names on the sand and find out the feelings of their best girl toward them. You know the way, you say, "Friendship, courtship, hatred, love, marriage," with the letters that are left.

Just fancy! the boys had never done it before. So I wrote Ada's and Vane's names, and it came to hatred both sides; and would you believe it, he was quite disconsolate. So I told him I knew another way to do it, crossing them out only in couples, and we did it that way, and it came to marriage for Ada and courtship for him, and he was as pleased as could be; and when I pointed out Ada seemed to have got on a bit farther than he, he looked at me in a queer

sort of way and said he guessed if it was necessary he could soon catch up.

I was only joking, but I shall have to be careful if he is going to think things like that. I thought it was just a boy and girl bit of nonsense; Ada is far too young to think of marriage, and so is he. If the wind blows that way I shall stop helping them, but perhaps he didn't mean it, and anyway they go back to Melbourne soon, and I suppose it will fizzle out then.

Next we did Micky and his little girl in Melbourne, and it came out eminently satisfactory; and then the sillies insisted on doing mine and Gordon's, and it came to love on both sides, and I actually blushed, to their huge delight. What on earth made me do it, I can't imagine; I suppose their persistent teasing is beginning to make us both a bit self-conscious.

But I do wish Mrs. Haste wouldn't get so perturbed, for it's too absurd, if they knew; there's absolutely nothing in it.

While we were sitting there who should come along but Dr. Philip—in bathing costume? Oh, dear no! He doesn't approve of mixed bathing. His attire was most complete, and I believe when he saw us three he wouldn't have minded adding a veil to his costume to hide his blushes. I do hate prigs, especially masculine ones. At first he just walked past and raised his hat, looking very disapproving. What business has he to disapprove of me anyway? I felt so annoyed I laughed sweetly at some remark of Micky's which wasn't more than usually absurd,

and the laugh pursued him down the sand; he walked a trifle faster.

Both the boys sat up and looked after him. They looked dears in their bathing suits, with their hard-looking brown arms and legs. Men look nicer than girls in undress, I agree with Gordon.

"Who's your pal, Thyme?" Vane demanded. "What a streak, worse than Micky."

"Lor' bli' me," said the insulted Micky. They *will* use the most awful language just to shock people. They are very young. "Don't compare me to a dude like that. Why, his collar's five feet high!"

"He's got an eye for a figure anyway," said Vane. "Look out, Thyme, Horace is coming back."

And sure enough come back he did, to my intense amazement. He stopped, too, as he reached us, looking as if he were swallowing a dose of his own physic, but he complimented us on our "perspicacity" or something (Micky nearly choked as he rolled it out) on choosing such a healthy method of spending such a lovely day. I never felt so ashamed in my life. I had to introduce the boys, of course, and they did nothing but giggle. I know Dr. Philip has rather a haw-haw English manner, but he's quite nice underneath, and the kids' amusement was simply barefaced.

I was furious with them, so I suppose that was why I was lots nicer to him than I would have been otherwise. At any rate, he stayed quite a time talking—he sat down on the sand with us, even. Imagine the immaculate Dr. Philip in such riotous

half-clad company! In fact, he stayed till I told him I was cold and was going to dress.

He offered to motor me home, but I refused.

When he had gone I spoke my mind to the kids, but they only laughed worse than ever.

"Great Scott!" said Vane, imitating Dr. Philip's pet ejaculation, "couldn't you pick up anything better than that, Thyme? Come over to Melbourne, old girl, and I'll find you a dozen better than him."

And boxing their ears didn't do a bit of good.

They kept bursting into insane giggles all the way home on the ferry. And Dr. Philip is not absurd at all; he was almost jolly yesterday, he only needs shaking up.

But what I set out to write about was the tea. We met Ada after she got away from "kindy," and all went into the teashop, and of course half Sydney was there—it always is. I felt horribly virtuous being there with the youngsters, because while I was shopping I refused to go with Mr. Wymondham, whom I met in Pitt Street. I don't dislike him quite as much as I used, at least I mean he can be amusing on occasions. He's malicious rather, and his stories are double-edged always. I feel he's bad inside, but I suppose as he goes everywhere it's not my affair.

Gordon hates him, though.

And half-way through the tea I happened to glance up toward the smoking-lounge the other side, and I saw, vanishing through the door, Mr. Wymondham and—guess, G.G.C. !—Mr. Gale.

I nearly fell off my seat. Wasn't it queer to see

him just then? Of course he's nothing to me or I to him, but I wonder if he saw me. If he's got time to go to four o'clock with Mr. Wymondham, he could find time to ring me up. Of course they may have been talking business. But I don't suppose he wants to see me again anyway. I don't want to see him either, except I'd like to have the chance of giving him a nice snub.

But I wonder, if I had accepted Mr. Wymondham's invitation, would we have met him just the same? Why didn't I say I'd go? Really, Thyme O'Dea, you've got no self-respect. But he was so nice, and I'm sure there's a misunderstanding somewhere.

Of all credulous asses!

CHAPTER XIII

THE TRAGEDY OF DISILLUSION

HEAVENS! we have had a busy day. I'm desperately tired, so tired I don't feel like bed. If I did go, I should stay awake for hours, so I think I'll talk to you, G.G.C., and perhaps as I write I'll get sleepy. I can hear Marje splashing round in her room; she's a perfect maniac for water, and washes about nineteen times a day. And I saw the light in Ada's room go out ten minutes ago, and here's me still talking. Marje says I'm an awful chatterbox, but some one's got to do it, and she can take her share when she feels inclined.

She had us in fits this morning when we were getting the lunch ready. We had the Premier and a couple of other Senators to lunch to-day, and mother had a bridge party in the afternoon, so you can guess we were occupied. Marje stayed home to-day to help us, and while she was sitting on the kitchen table beating up eggs for me she told Biddy and me about some of the women they visit.

Many are most awfully grateful, but some almost resent the nurses trying to teach them. There's one, Marje says, they are all a bit scared of. Her name is Mrs. George, and her baby's name is Georgie

George. He's been sickly for a long time, and the doctor ordered him whey.

"For a few days," Marje said, "it seemed to suit him, and Mrs. George, who is a perfectly enormous woman, almost assaulted me with gratitude. I think she meant it for an embrace, but you could hardly have told the difference.

"'Oh, nurse,' she said, 'Georgie do love 'is whey. E'd eat it all day if I'd let him.'

"I thought this sounded suspicious, having had experience of her sort before, so I answered, 'Does he, Mrs. George? Well, tell me how you make it.'

"'Oh!' she said, 'with them tabloids you gave me. I just put one in a cup o' water with a spoonful of condensed milk.'

"Condensed milk, mind you," Marje laughed. "What are you to do with women like that? And though I talked till I was tired, I couldn't make her understand the enormity of it. So it's no wonder she's come to the conclusion that whey doesn't agree with Georgie. I went along there again yesterday, and the poor mite looked dreadful.

"'Well, what are you giving him now you've stopped the whey, Mrs. George?' I asked. And she answered with an ogreish glare:

"'I'm givin' 'im the blood o' meat—yes, I am. The butcher told me as how he'd brought up his three on it, and I'm tryin' it on my Georgie. He says there ain't no nourishment in that there whey stuff you ordered, and if my Georgie's got to die I'd sooner he died on a full stomach than an empty one. Oh,

you needn't talk to me about your doctors. I wouldn't 'ave that Doctor 'Allet's conscience, that I wouldn't. It's my belief,' she went on, dropping her voice, 'that 'e's tryin' to make a record for 'imself in killin' babies; starvin' 'em to death is 'is fancy. Well, I ain't goin' to 'ave my Georgie starved. If the Lord's going to take 'im, I won't stop *'im* with whey, and if 'E ain't—well, I'll 'ave saved 'im.'"

Marje is full of little incidents like that if you can only get her going. She's just crazy on nursing in any shape or form, and she used to talk about the fun it was so much when she was doing her course that she fired me with a desire to be one too. I even went into a hospital as a probationer, and stayed exactly three days; then I came home. It was simply awful, I couldn't stand it. There was a woman who used to scream. I can't bear to see people suffering; it seems to start a pain somewhere inside me. Marje, I suppose, is a born nurse, for it makes her calm and practical and interested at once. I believe she almost likes to see pain when she can do things for it; it makes her feel so clever.

Oh-h! Another yawn. I believe the sleepiness is beginning, but I'll go on a little longer. Oh, bother! I meant to ask Ada for a throat pastille before she went to bed. I made my throat sore to-night singing. I've had a slight cold for a week, and I shouldn't have sung so much, but I was in at Ida's, and she was very keen on it. I went in there to dinner. She asked me in casually as we were chatting over the fence down the garden. There was no one there

except the brother-in-law and Mr. Wymondham. Certainly, Mr. Wymondham is good-looking even if a bit preserved. His eyes followed me about half the evening, and he went quite mad over my singing, or pretended to. I expect it was mostly pretense. I've only a small voice, though people say it's sympathetic.

He seemed quite sorry when they had to go. Ida turned them out soon after dinner; she simply told them to go away and do anything they liked, as they were boring her to death. She's awfully rude to men at times, but they seem to like it. I expect she makes up for it afterward, because they know quite well they don't really bore her at all. I think her moods of petulance are half a pose. I told her so to-night after they had gone, but she only laughed.

"I dare say they are," she admitted. "I suppose I do pose, but then so does every one: all mankind acts. I'm just cleverer at it than some, in fact I've reduced being any one but myself to a fine art, but where I differ from most people is I don't pose to myself. Oh, no, Daytime, I have no illusions about myself."

It's funny, isn't it, she should call me Daytime too, like Mr. Gale did? She has only started this last week or so. I think she must have been feeling rather blue to-night. At times she says the queerest things, a kind of darkness seems to fall over her eyes, and she looks miles and miles away. I think there must have been a real tragedy in her life somewhere, but when I once hinted at it she laughed and said,

"No more tragedy than I suppose is in every other being's life: slow disillusion. No, life hasn't treated me much worse than the next woman, and I suppose half of it was my own doing. I sometimes think, Daytime, that I was tired of life before I was born. I believe in reincarnation, you know."

"Ida, you don't!" I said.

"I wonder do I?" she mused. "I don't know that I believe anything. Oh, don't listen to me. Keep your faith in the goodness of life while you can, Daytime; it's a sweet and fair thing, and I love to see it, but I never had it, never. I suppose there are some of us on whom the eternal puzzle weighs more than others. It's awful to be in the middle of anything, isn't it? At the beginning you know where you are, and at the end, but in the middle, with the world around jostling and shoving ——"

She turned suddenly on me. "Do you know what it is to have a heartache without a cause? To have a vague pain somewhere deep down in you that hurts most when you are merriest? I wonder do we lose our memory of sorrows in a past life, but keep the shadow and apprehension of them? Sometimes I could cry for sheer misery, and yet nothing out of the ordinary has happened. Dreams, perhaps," she smiled reflectively. "I used to have them once. Do you know, Thyme, once I dreamed of being a noble woman à la Jeanne d'Arc, elevating my fellow-men and women, keeping my tongue on noble discourse, and so forth, treating men as intelligent souls. Oh, me!" she laughed, "what a comical girl I must

have been. Souls! They soon taught me what they were and what I was for. I was a woman—that ended it. A woman, to be petted and patronized and caressed, a creature meant only to minister to their ends otherwise—— Do you ever hate yourself, Thyme?"

"No," I said, "I don't think so. Why?"

Ida laughed queerly. "You'd think, to hear me talk of ideals, I was something special in the goodness line, wouldn't you? Whereas—the awful thing, Thyme, is you slowly grow to be what they want you to be, and worse than that, you grow to want to be it. I wonder why I cumber the earth at times. I only live for myself, and even I don't get much satisfaction out of it. Perhaps if I could stop thinking—I wonder.

"Selfishness is a horrible thing, isn't it? I'm quite selfish, but don't you think most people are? They try not to be. How many succeed? It's not the man who tries who gets anywhere, but the man who sets his jaw and says, 'I'll do it.' Trying is merely an ointment for the conscience. I don't try; I'd scorn to. You see, Daytime, the task is so gigantic it needs a gigantic soul. Selfishness is our nature, the very core of our being; to eradicate it you've got to overturn all your battlements and storied windows and the pretty gables of your life, and start laying the foundation stones again, painfully, one by one.

"It's a lifelong training. Amateurs in sport try, they train a little for the special race, but as soon as it's over they take up their usual pleasures again.

But a professional must always be training, he must never be out of form; and think—for his triumph in one department, what a host of enjoyments he has to relinquish. You see my meaning: there are thousands of amateurs in the game of goodness, but few have the courage to be professionals; there is too much to give up.

"Am I boring you? I suppose that view of unselfishness strikes one in a hundred. The other ninety-nine jog along contentedly, fancying they are progressing toward goodness as fast as God can reasonably expect; and it's no sin to them, I count, because they do not see they are sinning. But the hundredth—the hundredth, Daytime, chooses unselfishness or self, and the hundredth is either saint or sinner. I chose years ago, and I am not the saint."

Mother and Maida are right off the track. I'm sure a woman who talked like that couldn't be bad, could she? All the same, if my brother-in-law looked at me like hers does I'd give him one to go on with. But Ida seems to like them a bit wicked. I'm sure he must be wicked, because he and Gus Wymondham are bosom friends. He's not a friend of Ida's—Mr. Wymondham, I mean. Lance invites him there. In fact, Ida told me to-night she wouldn't advise me to have much to do with him, and when I pointed out that she knew him pretty well she said, "That's different; the only interest left in life is to play with fire."

"What a pity you haven't any children, Ida," I

said. But as soon as I had said it I wished I hadn't, for her face grew quite hard and she said: "*His* children! You don't know what you are talking about."

I felt I had made the most awful break, and changed the subject hastily, but I don't think she was really angry with me, for she kissed me goodbye in an apologizing manner, but I believe she must almost hate Mr. Lester. It's rather awful, isn't it, to hate your husband? But I don't wonder, the way he neglects her. And the more you loved him the more you'd hate him if he got indifferent. There's nothing hurts so much. Don't I know it? Thyme, you soft fool, you're thinking of that man still. Well, you shall just go to bed this minute for a punishment; you ought to be ashamed of yourself. I despise myself for ever wasting another thought on him. I dare say you despise me too, don't you, G.G.C.?

And so does he, so there we are.

CHAPTER XIV

DR. PHILIP COMES TO TEA

WHAT do you *think* happened last Sunday? I simply must write it down. I think it's the hugest joke that's happened for years. No, I can't gurgle it out in one breathless rush; it's too lovely for that. Take a deep breath, G.G.C., fold your hands, close your eyes, and when you are all patient, sympathetic attention I'll tell you. Oyez! Oyez!

> Philip Harley Lawrance, B.A., B.Sc., M.D.,
> Came round to our place Sunday to tea.

Only afternoon tea, but I couldn't put that in because of the metre. And he invited himself, that's the real joke. We all nearly fell off our chairs. We were having tea out on the lawn under the jacaranda trees—aren't they lovely with their pale blue flowers?—when Dr. Philip arrived. I love that spot. The arbor faces us from the other end, all grown over with jasmine and pink tecoma, and scarlet geraniums at the foot and along the hedge. I do love geraniums beside a lawn, don't you? There were several there, Gordon and Petermac and Hudson and a couple of kids belonging to Betty—college boys, you know—and, to crown all, Dolly Lawrance.

Dolly's face, when her brother came across the lawn, looking very stiff and ice-creamy and clever in his white suit, was a treat. She gave me one sharp look before she said, "Why, Philip, I didn't know you were coming."

I believe Dr. Philip was a wee bit put out at finding Dolly there (sisters are inconvenient at times, aren't they?), but he showed no signs of distress—that's one advantage of having an expressionless face, isn't it? He replied that he didn't know himself, but he'd been out for a spin in his car, and as he was passing our gate he thought he'd drop in and see if Mrs. O'Dea would give him a cup of tea.

Mother was pleased to see him. He's going to make his mark, is Dr. Philip. He's a specialist, you know, and has been studying for years in Berlin and Vienna and such places, and they say he's invented or improved a new operation, and he will be quite rushed—in fact, he is now, although he has only been in his rooms a fortnight. Every one is talking about him, so mother was delighted he chose to invite himself to our place, and her manner was a little less cold than usual. She held out her hand, looking awfully young and graceful to be the mother of a mob like us, and said in a soft voice:

"We are very pleased you came, Dr. Lawrance. Thyme, give the doctor a cup of tea."

She didn't look at me as she spoke, but I knew what it meant. Mother's clever as clever. Her eyes swept Marje and me as the doctor came across, and then she watched his face for a second and tabulated

the situation in her mind. Her little speech was a clear order to me to make myself agreeable to Dr. Philip.

I was sitting next to Gordon, enjoying myself, and I didn't want to move, but none of us dare disobey mother, so I got up and looked after him as pleasantly as I could. I felt sulky at first, but I caught a glint in mother's eye, and I hastily put a bit more warmth in my smile, and really, after a while, I enjoyed talking to him. He has a nice manner, even though it is a bit frozen, like mother's, and I like being conversed with on occasions as if I were clever and could understand things, though I dare say too much of it would get tiresome.

Gordon got quite sniffy too when I laughed at some of the things Dr. Philip said. Once or twice he actually was amusing. When he puts on his professional manner he is a model of polished decorum, and he is so used to it, for he has studied so hard for years—he rarely went in for the social side—that I think he finds it hard at times to be plain Philip Lawrance and forget he's Dr. Philip, B.A., and the rest. But when you have been chatting with him a while he seems to thaw right out, and I do believe he could be positively funny if you got him on his own, but other people being around seem to make him remember now and again he's Dr. Philip and the rest, and he stiffens up. Perhaps you could imagine him better if I told you Dolly and his mother always call him Philip in full. You couldn't imagine him answering to Phil.

But if it had been any one but Gordon I'd have

believed he was a bit jealous. I wonder why Gordon has never got sentimental, because we see a frightful lot of each other, and I know he is very fond of me. Perhaps we know each other too well. He has uncanny eyes, they see far too much, but I think I'd trust him more than any one I know. You'd be surprised at the things I tell him. I'm surprised myself at times when I think it over. He teases me tremendously, but if I'm ever in a hole, you wouldn't believe how sympathetic and helpful he is. I never knew a philosopher before, and sometimes he's aggravating. It is annoying, when you put on your coaxingest smile and ask for something, to have a man say critically, "You've got a smut on the side of your nose, Thyme," the smile apparently quite unnoticed.

Sometimes for sheer pique I feel a wicked desire to make him fall in love with me, but that is a horrid, low, sneaking thing to say, isn't it? I didn't know I'd thought it even, not actually thought it, for feeling a thought and thinking it are degrees of infamy, aren't they? Besides, it would spoil things so.

And I don't suppose I could do it anyway even if I tried.

I asked his advice on Sunday about Max. It's been worrying me a tiny bit lately once or twice, but it's so awkward to know what to say. You see he's never asked me to marry him point-blank, although sometimes he talks as if he had, but it's rather a delicate thing to refuse a man before he does, isn't

it? So I explained it a bit to Gordon, though I felt horrid, as it was his own brother, and you can't imagine how nice he was about it.

When I asked him what I'd better do, he said, "Why, nothing." He said, as far as he could judge, I'd done nothing Max could lay hold of, and if he chose to fancy things it was his own lookout. A man ought to be able to stand a disappointment or two without getting sour, and finally I needn't worry about Max in particular, for he wasn't the sort to break his heart over any girl, and he'd soon get some one to fill my place. I could have boxed his ears. Isn't he an old cat? That's the worst of him. Ask him for a dose of physic, and he rams a whole box of pills down your throat—without any sugar-coating either. I suppose I'm a mean little wretch; it just shows the bad stuff we're made of. I ought to feel awfully glad Max will soon be comforted, since I don't want him myself, and as a matter of fact the idea ruffles me considerably.

I wonder why a woman hates a man to stop loving her even if she doesn't love him? It's catty and absurd and mean, but we can't help feeling insulted. You know I was quite irritated with Hudson and Fay on Sunday. To sit there seeing him looking at Fay, and jumping up and doing things for her, and trailing around in her wake exactly as he used to for me, when Fay had skirts up to her knees—I felt several times I could have boxed his ears with joy, especially as Betty grinned at me whenever they looked particularly absorbed in each other, and I'm

sure she explained the delights of the situation to her college boys.

I was quite pleased after a bit that Dr. Philip had come; it reinstated me in my own and the family's eyes, even Betty was mildly impressed, for of course Gordon doesn't count. I went round the garden with him after a bit and showed him the fernhouse—Dr. Philip, not Gordon. He has asked me to go for a motor drive with him next Friday evening; it will be moonlight. Dolly and some one else will come too. I believe he would have asked me to go out that afternoon if Dolly hadn't been there. I believe it's what he came round for.

Dolly asked me if I had seen Mr. Gale lately. I replied very calmly and sweetly, "No, I don't think I have. I'm not often in town now. Have you?"

Dolly had to admit she hadn't either. She said he was in Melbourne. She tried to give me the impression he had told her he was going, but I found out later from Dr. Philip he had met him on his way to the train. Dr. Philip said it was his mother who was ill this time. He is very fond of Bob—"Copper," he calls him—he says he's a thoroughly straight fellow and tremendous good company. I know he's that.

Of course if his mother's ill I can understand how girls were put out of his head, but still I don't suppose he'll bother about me even when he gets back, if he isn't back already. It's too long now; he couldn't ring up.

Oh well, some people are fools.

Your great-grandmother for one.

CHAPTER XV

THE ETHICS OF PRUDERY

OH, dear! things that are awfully jolly are awfully rotten when there's no one there you care about—rottener because they ought to be so jolly, if you can understand.

I mean to-day's picnic.

Everything was perfect if —— The day was a perfect day for a picnic, just warm and yet not hot, sunny, and just enough cloud to temper it to a lazy blue; the horses were fresh; the tennis courts were in the sweetest, shadiest nook, with big tree-ferns and the greenest grass, and there was just enough—a small party of us, twenty-five all told, and all jolly sorts—and I did enjoy it in a way, I suppose. Oh, yes, I suppose I did, but ——

It's funny how you get used to being made a fuss over almost without noticing it. I've somehow got into the habit of taking it for granted. Everywhere I go, I matter very much to somebody; but to-day I didn't, and I didn't like it one bit. I must be conceited after all, for it really hurt. You see, all the mob were rather pals, and they were not quite my particular lot, though I knew most of them, and I felt the tiniest bit out of it. None of the boys liked me particularly, and, though of course I had some one

all the time and even coming home, I felt dull. I didn't want to talk to him.

Now if Bob had been there, or even Gordon!

I got most of my amusement out of watching the kids. They spread themselves out and no mistake; they did enjoy it. They were both there, and Ada and Fay too. You see it was really a kind of family party the Coles gave to the youngest girl, Mabel, who has just come out, and as they are our oldest friends they asked nearly the lot of us. Fred came too, but he didn't seem to fancy any of the girls there either. But Vane had a great time, and I think Ada enjoyed herself too, though she came to me once and said pettishly:

"For goodness' sake take him away and lose him, Thyme; he's making everybody laugh."

But I knew she didn't want me to really, although she may have honestly thought she did; she's not old enough yet to be always able to distinguish what she wants from what she only thinks she wants. Gordon taught me. Vane's quite satisfied with the way things are going and perfectly convinced Ada is the one girl in the world for him, was, is, or ever shall be, amen, and when he goes back to Melbourne they'll correspond until he has enough money for them to be married. And your great-grandmother, with all her accumulated experience of the changeableness of men, smiles sympathetically and, like the famous parrot, says nothing hard, and continues to keep on saying nothing, whereby she gains much gratitude and honor from Micky, Vane and Co.

But although Vane has interested Ada's pride, I don't think he has succeeded very far in awaking her feelings, or maybe she feels different from me; I don't think he's ever gotten a kiss out of her with all his devotion. Micky jeers at him loudly for it. There's nothing of the worship at a distance style about Micky, and he says so.

They argue it out in front of me often, and I never even smile.

"Pooh," Micky said heatedly one morning, after a lengthy discussion, "you don't know one thing about girls, you old melon. Catch me sitting by a girl's side half a mile away, like I saw you last night, as if you were afraid you'd catch fire if you got an inch closer. You ought to put your arm round her before she has time to say you mustn't, and if she objects, kiss her at once, the arm won't seem worth making a fuss about after that. Am I not right, Thyme?"

Micky knows far too much about girls for twenty.

"Rats!" said the badgered Vane. "You may know one sort of girl ——"

"Well, there is only one sort," Micky interposed.

"Oh, shut your head!" Vane snapped. "Look here, Thyme, do you reckon Ada would let me kiss her? I don't."

"Well, Vane," I said, "you ought to know more about it than I do."

"But honest now," Vane waved my hedging aside, "just for the sake of argument. Don't you think she'd never speak to me again? You keep quiet," to the disdainful Micky, "I'm talking to Thyme.

Put it another way," the seeker after knowledge went on. "Suppose it was you, and a fellow you'd only known as little as Ada has me, wouldn't you give him what for if he started on you?"

Vane's gaze was entirely innocent of offense, it expressed nothing but academic interest in the question, and I suddenly laughed. I laughed and laughed till the tears gathered in the corners of my eyes and the boys stared in amazement, but it struck me as so suddenly funny—Thyme O'Dea, arbiter of the ethics of prudery! I chuckle over it at minutes still. I'm saving it up to tell Gordon.

But Micky is not satisfied. He said to me later in an aside, "Look here, Thyme, of course he wouldn't tell us if he had, but do you reckon he hasn't kissed her?"

"Seriously, Micky," I replied, as I thought of Ada's sarcasms against me, "I reckon he has not."

"Well," said Micky as he swaggered off, "I bet she thinks him dead slow then."

That is how men who treat women as a class successfully for nine cases bungle sadly on the tenth.

But I can laugh at Micky too now, for he has had his heart slightly damaged by Fay. The accident occurred at the picnic, I suppose, because Hudson wasn't there, and Micky was about the handsomest boy present, and Mabel Coles showed signs of appreciating him. Fay is a little beggar that way—anything she sees any other girl wants acquires instant value in her eyes; and as she is as lovely as they make them, and entirely Micky's style, he rhapso-

dized about her to me next day almost as fervently as Vane, more noisily anyway. He came riding his bike, or rather Gordon's, round the lawn next morning while I was sitting on it drying my hair, and started whooping like a wild Indian, interspersing his shouts with such remarks as "She's a boshter!" "The out-and-outest that ever was!" "Isn't she a ripper, Thyme?"

Of course I was not indelicate enough to mention the little Melbourne girl, but it seemed Vane had no such scruples. However, he told me Micky is keeping an open mind on the subject. He doesn't see why a girl in Melbourne should interfere with one in Sydney or vice versa. Vane thinks his outlook wanting in uprightness.

But I suppose most men would agree with Micky.

CHAPTER XVI

IDA'S SECRET

I'M not the only person with troubles. Poor Ida's are worse than I ever guessed: her husband drinks. Of course I knew he did a bit—I saw the taxi-driver helping him up the path one night—but I supposed he only did it on occasions, like most men; but Ida told me to-night he's a habitual drunkard, he's scarcely ever sober. In fact he never is completely; he's just more or less drunk. And you'd never think to look at him—at least I never would, but perhaps that's why he speaks so little and so slowly. No wonder Ida is glad she has no children.

Oh! what a ghastly thing to live with day after day and year after year. It would drive me mad. I couldn't bear it. And she goes on bravely and never lets people know. She's fine and loyal to him; she bears it all by herself. All this time she's never breathed a word about it to me, and I don't suppose I'd have ever found out if I hadn't happened to go in to-night.

I remembered just after dinner I'd promised her the recipe for a new sweet I'd been trying, and as it was bright moonlight I just picked it up and slipped through the side gate up to her house. There was no one about and the hall door was open, so I ran

up-stairs to her room. I suppose I went quickly, and that must be why I didn't hear anything till I got to the top. Her boudoir just faces the staircase, so I couldn't retreat, but I felt horribly embarrassed, for I saw Ida lying on the floor sobbing like anything, and Lance Lester was bending over her patting her shoulder and trying to quiet her. Really they might have thought to shut the door, for if any of the servants had come up, heaven knows what they would have thought. Perhaps they had been up.

I felt a terrible fool standing there, but he had seen me, so I had to go on. "I beg your pardon, Ida," I said, "but I—I thought I'd run up with the recipe you wanted. I'm sorry I——" I stopped, not knowing what to say next, and Lance Lester broke in hastily:

"Thank you, Miss O'Dea, but Ida's rather upset to-night. She'll explain to-morrow and——"

But here Ida interrupted, sobbing, "No, let her come in and see. Come in, Thyme, and see what it is to have a brute for a husband. No, Lance, I will say it," as he bent down and tried to whisper something. She sat up, and her face was all distorted with crying and her eyes just blazed. "I've held my tongue and held it," she cried passionately, "and this is what I get for it, this: he put his foot through the face of the only thing I ever loved. Oh, Maisie, Maisie!" and she fell to sobbing again; and then I saw she was holding a crumpled picture in her hands and kissing it.

Lance spoke to me in a low aside. "It's her sister," he explained. "Ida worshiped her, and she died years ago. Lester—well," he shrugged his shoulders and made a little gesture, "since you're here you can see for yourself; he's been on the rampage."

And then I really looked at the room, and saw it was almost in ruins: the chairs were all overturned, and the curtains torn, and every picture was down off the wall with its glass broken. Ida had cut herself with a piece from her sister's photograph, and the blood was trickling down her arm, and some of it had got on her face. She looked dreadful and she still sobbed.

"But—but what made him do it?" I asked dazedly.

Ida lifted her head and laughed a fierce kind of laugh. "What made him do it?" she echoed. "What always makes him do it over and over till I'm sick and weary of life and the bondage of it? He was drunk—that's what made him do it, Thyme. Drunk, as he always is week in and week out; and he stamped on my Maisie, my little Maisie. Oh, I won't bear it any longer! I won't, Lance; I won't, I tell you."

I stood there feeling as if the room were whirling round me. I didn't seem able to grasp it so quickly, but Lance went over and tried to soothe her, and after a while she grew quieter and we got her up, and I took her into her bedroom, while Lance stayed behind and gathered up the glass and re-

hung the pictures; they didn't want the maids to see the mess. And by the time I got her into bed she was nearly herself again, only every time she looked at the crumpled portrait of her sister the tears would start again. I wouldn't have believed Ida could love any one so. But Lance told me later their mother had died when the younger girl was born, and though they soon had a stepmother, Ida had really brought her up, and had never quite got over her loss.

I sat by her when she felt better, and she apologized to me for letting me see what had happened, though it was an accident, not her fault, and then she told me about his always being like that. She said he had been so for years, but he wasn't always violent, and generally she could manage him, but to-night he had started smashing up the place before she could get to him. I don't see how a bit of a thing like she is could manage such a huge man if he got angry, but when I said that she smiled queerly and said she could quiet him always.

"You won't tell any one, will you, Daytime?" she said. "I can't bear people to know. It's my own trouble, and I can't endure pity; I don't want it. I can scrape along. Don't tell your people, will you? and try to forget it yourself."

I promised to try, but I know I never shall. No wonder they have Mr. Lester's brother living with them. I should think Ida would be scared to be in the house alone with her husband. Poor girl! No wonder she is so queer and bitter at times. She does say strange things. She talked a lot before she would

let me go. She didn't seem to want to be left alone, but when I offered to stay and sleep with her she wouldn't let me. She said her husband might want her in the night, and anyway she had Lance.

"You poor old dear," I said as I kissed her. "Oh, Ida, you don't deserve this."

She laughed. "Who knows," she said; "perhaps I do. Perhaps it's my cross—crosses are supposed to be good for people, aren't they?—but I shouldn't say mine had mellowed me much, would you, Thyme? I often wonder whether it's my own fault I've had an unhappy life, or if it is my fate or just my disposition. I've always kicked. I never could accept things because they were so, and life's hard on rebels, perhaps rightly. Who knows? And yet there's a queer joy in pain at times, a kind of exaltation to feel you are raised above the common herd even by suffering, a sort of pharisaical pride that you are not on the happy level of other men. I often think it was just this pride that inspired the anchorites and martyrs. Perhaps it's just pride that makes me cover up Lester like this and stick to him. I suppose it is; it certainly isn't love, and I hardly think it's pity, and yet"—she smiled a mournful little smile, not the kind I'd ever expect to see on her—"I loved him once. Oh, what a hell is in just memory, Thyme! Lester and I loved each other once, and yet when I tell you so it seems unbelievable, as if I were speaking about two friends I once knew. For the Lester I loved is dead, and the me that loved him is dead too."

She was silent a while and her hand gripped me hotly. "'Divine discontent,'" she said after a little. "He was great, the man who found that phrase, wasn't he, Daytime? The trouble is it's so often confounded with liver complaint. Oh, Daytime, I must laugh, or I shall cry again, and I never cry—to-night was the first time for years."

"Ida," I said, "I wonder you can bear it."

"I wonder I can myself at times. But there are things you've got to bear, just got to, Thyme. You'll find it out some day perhaps, though I hope you won't. We're all bound, free as we seem, and women are the worse bound of the two. Our very sex binds us. We fetter ourselves because of it, because we are taught we should. To my mind the only brave woman in the whole of history was Ninon de l'Enclos, because she dared to be herself. When she learned the inequality of women and men she cried indignantly, '*De ce moment je ne suis faite homme*,' and she lived up to her declaration. It's we women who are to blame, though. We are the judges, and—we decide as the men will us to decide. We forgive them drunkenness, infidelity—they hate both in women, so we condemn it pitilessly in each other. I hate women, Daytime; they're a compound of bully and coward, bully to their own sex, cringers to the men. Oh, I hate them—because I am one. There, that's small and catty enough for a true woman, isn't it? Why should I be catty? Why should we all be catty by nature? We are, you know. It doesn't seem fair flesh and blood should

play such a part in our lives: how much is me, really me, and how much inherited female instinct? Oh, the patronage of man is insufferable enough, but Nature's patronage is worse. She made us weaker and gave us all the hardnesses of life and—beauty, charm, you say. Well, aren't they just incense to man's power? When I use my charm to wheedle anything out of a man, don't I despise myself for it? It enrages me to think I can't claim it on equal ground. I've despised myself worse than heaven can ever despise me. I'm glad I've forestalled them. If they disapprove, it's a comfort to know they are only endorsing my own opinion."

"Ida!" I said. I did think this was going a bit strong, but she gave a little shrug.

"Oh, I dare say I'm becoming blasphemous, but I'm honest, and so one counterbalances the other. All the great thinkers of the world—Plato, Buddha, Mahomet, Christ—have been men: why are there women at all, I want to know? It's not fair to have half humanity inferior."

"But," I said, remembering some of dad's maxims, "there's no such thing as equality in Nature. Look at wealth——"

"This isn't an economical question. Rich or poor, a woman is man's inferior."

"Well, would you have all tigers in the world and no deer?"

"Not," she said, "if I were a tiger. I suppose if I had been a man I should have thought women a highly estimable institution. That's what the aver-

age man at the back of his mind regards us as, you know—just an institution. Ah, well"—she stopped herself impatiently—"you'd better go now, or your people will be wondering what is keeping you. Good-night, and send Lance to me as you go."

I found him in the smoking-room, and told him Ida wanted him, and he went up-stairs, but—of course it's all right, but—yes, I can't help it, I don't think it's very nice of Ida to talk to him when she's in bed, do you? Of course she had a jacket on, and he's her brother-in-law, and some people are more Bohemian than others—anyway it's none of my business; but it's not very wise of her, for servants see everything, and I suppose it's things like that getting round that are making people talk, for Mrs. Haste was talking to mother about her only yesterday.

But sitting here in my own room it seems just fantastic that there are dreadful things like that happening next door. Our houses look so quiet and respectable.

CHAPTER XVII

BOB GALE RETURNS

IT'S a blazing day, one of those corkers that make you think civilization isn't what it's cracked up to be, and that a savage lounging under a palm tree "mid noddings on" has, like Mary, chosen the better part. Not that I'm in Pitt Street rig myself. I am clad simply and gracefully (at least I hope so) in a Canadian bathing suit and a kimono; when I get to my own room it's plain bathing suit. Mother has retired to her bedroom and announced she's not at home, though I don't suppose any one would be insane enough to visit on a day like this—it's 103° in the shade. Fay and Ada are dressed something like me, and Betty's in a pair of pink silk pajamas. She does look a cut, but they are her latest fad; she won't wear nightgowns.

I'm afraid we're in for a heat wave. The flies are swarming in to every cool corner, around the front door and along the veranda roof they are like a hive of nasty buzzing things; I hate them. It's even too hot to eat. I've had practically nothing but stewed fruit for three days; the sight of meat turns me sick. Marjoram lives on cucumbers and tomatoes and potato salad, and mother refuses to touch anything but junket; but it doesn't matter,

summer things are all easy to make. Biddy and I get up early and concoct the day's menu about 6 A. M.

From about five to eight is the only part of the day when you can breathe. Ada was up at five this morning ironing in her nightgown ; she said it was the coolest way to get through it. It's part of the general cussedness of things that the very kind of weather that makes you disinclined to be energetic is the kind that gives you twice as much work as usual. You can imagine the amount of washing and ironing in our household with six women in it living in white frocks.

The weather has been warming up for four or five days now. Poor dad will be soon in the hospital if it doesn't slacken off a bit ; he's so fat, you know, poor angel. If you didn't die laughing you'd have to weep to see the dear old mountain, with as little on as decency permits, mopping at his streaming face and cursing softly and enthusiastically whenever Smith brings the car round to take him to the House. The things he says about collars and the man who invented them are enough to make them crumple up ; however, the collars do almost as soon as they get on dad's neck. He feels the heat dreadfully. For the last few nights he's been camping downstairs in the underground billiard room ; he says it's cooler than outside. But I don't think underground rooms are healthy myself, although we have a big lounging room next door the billiards we girls all camp in if it gets too hot to live.

I think the triplets are playing cards there now. I'd go myself, but I want to write, and they make such a noise one can't hear oneself think. If you find any grease-spots on the paper, great-grandchildren, please excuse them ; they are bits of me melting off, and I can't afford to lose any more now, or, as Gordon says, I'll be getting scraggy. However, when I went to the door just now I felt the wind was veering round to the east, so perhaps we'll get a cool change to-night. We felt so disgusted too : Maida had a letter from her brother yesterday who's in South Australia, and he said they're having it as cool as cool. I can't see why the weather man's got a particular spite against Sydney. Jack says it ought to comfort us to remember the whole world isn't melting, but I don't find it does a bit. Whenever we complain of the heat he says, "Just think how freezing Mawson and his party must be at the Pole, and the poor Esquimaux all wrapped up in their furs."

But it makes me hotter to think of furs anywhere.

I'm glad it wasn't as hot as this the night Dr. Philip took us out ; I do look a sketch when my face is all shiny with perspiration. It was tremendously jolly. We took a hamper with us and made "billy" tea on the roadside. We started at six, and got home soon aften ten. There were just four of us, but you'll never guess who the fourth was, G.G.C. Have a try. Dr. Philip and me and Dolly and—you never will—Mr. Gale.

Aren't you gasping? I did. When the motor

toot-tooted round for me I just vaguely saw three figures in the car, for Dr. Philip drove himself, but I only glanced at Dolly's escort as I went to climb in. I didn't suppose I knew the man from Adam, and then Dr. Philip said, "You've met Mr. Gale, haven't you?" and Dolly grinned at me triumphantly from beside him.

I didn't know what to make of the situation. I was astounded. I don't in the least remember how I behaved, but I suppose I nodded and assented—it's wonderful how mere social training stands by you at a crisis. When you've absolutely lost your wits it comes to your aid, and quite mechanically you find yourself doing and saying the right thing.

But I was silent for quite several minutes after we started, trying to adjust my mind. Fortunately, Dr. Philip's whole attention was centred on driving the motor, which wasn't inclined to "mote," but presently he apologized for his neglect and began to talk about I've no idea what, for all the time I was saying "Yes" and "No" to him I was wondering how long Mr. Gale had been back from Melbourne and whether he really was keen on Dolly after all and how on earth I should treat him when the car stopped.

He seemed to be enjoying himself behind too. Dolly was giggling every two seconds, though she may have only done it to aggravate me—girls sometimes do. Now and again his laugh came with hers; but we only caught an unintelligible murmur, and if there's one thing more irritating than another it's to hear a conversation you can't understand when

you'd like to. After one specially prolonged chuckle from the two of them, Dr. Philip said:

"Copper and Dolly seem to have some joke between them."

I murmured something vague out of the depths of my veil and he went on:

"I am glad Copper could come, the run will do him good. He's not been very well lately; he has been sticking too close to business, I fear, and on top of that he has had serious illness in his family."

"Dolly told me," I said. "Is his mother better? Has he been back long?"

"Only a few days," Dr. Philip replied, dodging suddenly round a wagon. "Yes, she is on the road to recovery, I believe."

"And—and you asked him to come?" I pursued as carelessly as I could. "I didn't know he was a friend of yours. I knew of course that Dolly knows him very well."

"Friend," Dr. Philip echoed, "I should think so. We were chums at Scotch together, and he was always at our house when we lived in Melbourne. He was the first fellow I looked up when I got home this time. I am glad for my part he has been moved to Sydney."

"But he is young to have such a responsible position, isn't he?" I hazarded to make him go on talking.

"He is rather, but Copper has a shrewd head. His father is as hard-headed a business man as you'll find in all Australasia, who keeps family sentiment in its

proper place, and since Copper holds this position it means he's worth it, not merely that he is his father's son."

"Yes?" I said, with a big interrogation mark. But Dr. Philip had evidently had enough of Mr. Gale, and started on radium, so all I had to do was look astonished and say "Oh!" at decent intervals.

But I was so glad it was at Dr. Philip's invitation he came, and not Dolly's.

Then we stopped and had supper on the roadside. It was fantastic with the fire licking up around the billy and making alternate splotches of red and shadow on our faces. We didn't get a chance to speak to each other beyond commonplaces, for Dolly was a spider—all eyes, but as we got out of the car he came up with his hand out to me and said:

"May I say good-evening now, Miss O'Dea"—his red-brown eyes stared straight into mine for half a second as he added, "if you haven't forgotten me?"

"Very nearly, I'm afraid," I answered lightly as I drew my hand away; but I couldn't help my eyes dancing, for Dolly was keeping a close watch on us, and when anything appeals to my sense of humor I can't be cross no matter how much cause I've got, and it did seem absurd to be talking with a *sous-entendu* to a man I disliked because a girl was jealous of him.

But he was pretty clever at the game. He wasn't silly enough to try any whispers or low asides with Dolly's eye on us. He just said quite loudly and cheerfully as he gathered up the rugs:

"There, forgotten in a few weeks' absence! You are more truthful than polite, I'm afraid. Well, I must just try not to give you another chance, that's all."

"The absence may not have been the essential ingredient," I said as we sat down by the fire.

He made a grimace. "Oh, you are too bad," he said. "Please, my punishment is greater than I deserve. Pip," he added, turning to Dr. Philip, "you know a lot of anatomy or surgery or something. Can you tell me why women's hearts are harder than men's?"

Dr. Philip laughed like anything as he looked up from struggling with a tin of sardines. "What nonsense is he talking to you now, Miss O'Dea?" he asked. "Don't mind him; he's always like that. And see if you can do anything with these sardines, there's a good fellow; my surgery, as you call it, doesn't seem to impress them much."

"Miss O'Dea and I," he said as he obediently took the tin, "are having a philosophical argument as to the truth of the aphorism that absence makes the heart grow fonder. Miss O'Dea doubts it. What do you think, Pip?"

I nearly expired every time he said it. Fancy calling Dr. Philip Pip! But he answers to it quite cheerfully; it seems unbelievable the doctor was ever a boy.

"I think," he retorted, "you had better confine your attention to those sardines and leave philosophic questions alone, and as far as you are con-

cerned, Copper, I should imagine proximity would be a stronger spur to you than absence."

"Pip," Mr. Gale said solemnly, as he threw a piece of bread at him, "you are a faithless friend and an unmitigated rotter. Don't you take his estimate of my character, Miss O'Dea, judge me at first hand."

"Granted the opportunity," I said lightly, "perhaps. Please pass the butter."

"Oh, I shall see you have," he answered in the same jesting tone, but he gave me a look with it that said he meant it.

Dolly was suspicious, though I don't think she quite followed; indeed, it would have been hard for any one not in the know, wouldn't it? and of course Dr. Philip thought we were just jesting. We had quite some fun sitting there, the four of us. I think two men who are fond of each other are nicer together than apart, and you could see Dr. Philip and he think a heap of each other. Dolly was inclined to be sulky at first, with occasional spurts into the conversation to outshine me, but I was just merry, and the ball rolled along without greasing.

We got talking about Alice in Wonderland. Dr. Philip said at times I reminded him of Alice, I looked so elfin and dreamy and naughty—imagine Dr. Philip admiring anything naughty!—so Bob suggested we should all make up a rhyme about Alice and the Lobster. We all protested we couldn't, but he insisted, and when you're out on the loose you feel so mad you do anything, and we

finally tried. They were all more or less awful of course. Mine was the more. Dr. Philip's was good, or would have been if he could have thought of a last line, but he took too hard a word to rhyme. His went:

"A lobster was once asked by Alice
If it wanted to live in a palace,
The lobster said 'Yes,
Oh, rather, I guess ——'"

He said he simply couldn't think of another line, so Bob suggested:

"'But I think I can do in my shell-case.'"

But it isn't a real rhyme, is it?

Bob said he would have to give the prize to himself after all. His was really clever, and when he read it I knew why he had suggested the game. It ran:

"Alice said to the lobster, 'Monsieur,
I'd no notion that you would be here.'
The lobster said, 'True,
But I came to see you,
Let us lunch and I'll make all things clear.'"

Dolly and Dr. Philip applauded it mightily, but I felt rather stupid, for he looked at me quickly under his lashes again in that way he has, and I knew it was a message to me.

Isn't it wonderful what a lot of talking you can do without opening your lips!

And just as we were getting into the car to go back Dr. Philip called Dolly for a second, and he said quickly as he helped me on with my coat:

"Did you understand?"

"You couldn't have known," I answered in the same cautious way, for Dolly had one eye and ear cocked on us.

"Pip told me when he asked me to come."

"Why didn't you ring up?" I murmured. Then aloud for Dolly's benefit, "Please hold it out while I push my collar down."

He, holding the coat out as requested, "I had been away so long I was afraid you might think it cheek. I hadn't time before. Are you *very* angry?"

"I'm not sure." Aloud, "Thank you."

"May I ring up and see?" as Dolly joined us.

I nodded. I couldn't very well do anything else, could I? It was only fair to hear his explanation, if he had one, and he certainly couldn't make it in front of Dolly—she didn't give us a chance of another word. He had to get in the back beside her, and I with Dr. Philip in the front. But I felt quite different going home from coming out. I didn't mind his being with Dolly a bit, for I knew he was thinking of me and wishing he could change places, and that's such a comfortable lovely feel for a woman to have.

I didn't even want to talk to him, I felt so secure, and as they put me down at the gate I shook hands with him and Dr. Philip and kissed Dolly. We never even exchanged a surreptitious glance; he

just put a slight meaning in his eyes as he touched my hand and said pleasantly:

"Good-bye, Miss O'Dea, I am glad to have met you again."

But if Dolly had understood all that had passed between us that evening wouldn't she have been furious? After all, I believe thoughts can talk to each other, don't you? for we'd hardly exchanged a dozen sentences, and yet I knew plainly that he liked me very much and wanted to see me again, and would not have come out if I had not been going, and Dolly was less than nothing to him, and he wanted awfully to be friends.

But Dolly wasn't on to the telepathy part, and she drove away quite complacent.

He rang up the next day and asked if the white flag was still flying, but we couldn't say much, for the triplets were hovering round—that's the worst of having a telephone in the passage. He guessed at something of the sort from the guardedness of my replies, I suppose, for he said suddenly:

"Is there any one listening your end?"

"Rather," I answered feelingly, without thinking, and then we both laughed, and I couldn't be stiff after that. It made us feel intimate to be under suspicion. So he said:

"Look here, it's no use my trying to explain on the 'phone. I shall only muddle things. Mayn't I see you? Will you come to lunch again?"

"Oh, I don't know," I said awkwardly. I felt awkward. I did want to see him again, but I didn't

want him to think the minute he gave his invitations I'd grab at them, especially after my luckless letter and the awful way he'd made me feel. "I'd—I'd rather not," I said bluntly.

"I see," he answered, and there was a pause.

I felt horrid, so I said hastily, "I'd like to talk it over, if you can understand, but I—— Couldn't you think of anything else?"

"Oh," he said in a different tone. "I'm a clumsy wretch, I know, but I'm sorry. Would it be another blunder to suggest—— Are you going to town to-morrow?"

"Yes," I replied, "to physical culture."

"What I was going to say was, could I meet you after it and drive you home in my car? I could meet you anywhere you like any time after half-past four. Is that taking too much for granted? But I really can't explain on a 'phone, you know."

So we left it at that. He met me and drove me home and explained everything. He left in a tearing hurry for Melbourne when his mother was ill, and that upset the office for goodness knows how long. She was frightfully bad, nearly died, and he had to be backward and forward between the two States. He hadn't time for one of his friends—only her and the business, and when she was out of danger at last, he was going to write, but he didn't know quite what to say. He didn't know me very well really, and he wasn't sure I'd care to hear from him. Perhaps I'd quite dismissed him from my mind, with all the other men I know, and would

think it cheek if he apologized for neglecting me, as if it mattered to me what he did or didn't do. Anyway, we were quite friends again by the time he dropped me at our gate, and he's coming to tea on Sunday.

I do hope it won't be as hot as it is now. I haven't told the family he's coming yet; I suppose I shall get some cheek from Betty about my Storm-man when I do.

Still, the world is a nice old place.

CHAPTER XVIII

CONSEQUENCES

SUNDAY was *so* nice. It had turned beautifully cool again; the change came Saturday afternoon, and I was glad, for it is hard to look charming when you feel like a vanishing grease-spot. I've been shopping with Maida to-day, and we had a lovely talk. Really, it does seem too unreal at times to think of her being married. Do you ever find yourselves somehow not believing what's actually happened around you, and having a feeling at the back of your mind that you'll wake up presently and find you've only dreamed it? Often and often when I'm nursing Peterjohn I look across at Maida's thin little face and think we must be back in school listening blankly to Miss Harriet demanding to know "If six pounds of sausage cost four gallons of tears, what was the medicine the doctor gave?" or something equally intelligible.

She and Jack were up on Sunday. She wanted to see my red-headed man. Maida hates red hair, but she said his wasn't aggressive at all. She liked him, but even if she hadn't she would have, if you can understand. We would always like each other's men, even if they were hateful—it's part of our

loyalty. It was so funny too; it turned out he and Jack knew each other slightly.

We had good fun. Much the usual crowd were there: Petermac, of course, and Micky and Vane, and the Hyleses, and Betty's pair. Edith Carson turned up too for a while. Fred was home, and he seemed to take rather a fancy to Bob. Fred isn't often home now. The family is worrying a bit; he's got mixed up with some girl—a barmaid or shop-assistant or somebody—and mother is furious about it, but of course she daren't say much. Fred is awfully obstinate. She is a pretty girl anyway—I saw her once with him in town—but of course not quite the sort one yearns for as a sister-in-law. I hope he won't be so silly, but of course it's his funeral; he's got to live with his wife, not us.

Mother was gracious to Mr. Gale, and I could see he admired her. I was so glad. We're rather proud of mother, you know; we regard her as a family masterpiece that we exhibit to visitors. I only wish I could be half as lovely when I'm her age. He was charming to her too, and looked after Mrs. Haste, who came across for tea, like a combination of a son and mechanical waiter. She fell straight in love with him, I could see it, and I liked him for it all the more. I love men to be thoughtful for old ladies. He talked to her as if he were really enjoying himself, and yet when he joined us again he was as nonsensical as anybody. He suggested playing "Consequences" while we were out on the lawn too, so Ada got some paper and pencils.

None of us had played for ages, and we all enjoyed it. I think "Consequences" are real fun, don't you, G.G.C., or don't you condescend to such a pastime? But they are so absurd and unexpected, and sometimes they fit almost as if the one person had made it up, instead of it being the accidental higgledy-piggledy of a dozen different ones. We laughed and laughed over them when they were read out. Mine was too ridiculous for words. It came that "The sentimental Thyme met the perky Mr. Gale in the middle of a beatific smile. He told me I was the biggest prevaricator he had ever met, and I replied that his googly eyes had left scars on my heart, and the consequence was we fought to a finish and eloped, and the world said the love of Paolo and Francesca paled before ours."

Of course it was mad and absurd, but Bob said, in an aside, as we rose to go in to tea:

"Our consequences seem to have got a bit ahead of us, don't they?"

"And gossip is seldom trustworthy," I laughed.

"How delightful if it were," he reflected.

Of course Mr. Wymondham chipped in just as I was going to take Mr. Gale round the garden, and spoiled everything. I don't know why he irritates me so dreadfully, I'm never nasty to any one but him. I think it is that he's so dreadfully superior. He makes me feel a worm even when he's being nice to me, and the worm turns. But I do think English people are unnecessarily proper on the outside, for I'm sure he's not proper inside, or anything

like it. But the other day I was telling Gordon about my bathing-suit-kimono costume for the hot weather—now do you see any harm in that?—but Mr. Wymondham started in to raise his brows. I loathe people who raise their eyebrows, because I can't do it myself—not effectively—so I added:

"I'm thinking of wearing it to the next fancy-dress party. Would you dance with me in it, Gordon?"

He said, "I'd dance with you in anything, Thyme."

"Even in a saucepan and a ham frill?" I queried recklessly as the eyebrows shot higher.

"More," he responded, playing up to me; "I'd dance with you in a dream."

He didn't pester me for quite a time after that. I wonder what on earth he likes me for; I wish he didn't. You want any one you like to like you, but when it's some one you don't care about his affection is merely irritating and somehow sort of cheek. Affection from any one, I always think, gives you a feeling of being in their debt unless you can repay it by answering affection, and you hate being under an obligation to any one you dislike, especially an involuntary one.

I wonder if you understand that, G.G.C.? Gordon thinks as I do, unless it is I think like him—I often suspect that's about the size of it. He has queer ideas on lots of things. For instance, he doesn't believe in love—he says there's no such thing. There's passion, which nearly everybody feels some time or

other, and there's friendship, which is liking and respect; and what is called "love" is a combination of the two: the former is transient and glorious and mad, the second is lasting and sober and respectful, and the best love has just the right proportion of each. But love, as third and distinct emotion, has no existence—at least so Gordon says. I wonder if he's right. But I don't suppose most people would believe him, and I'm quite sure Bob would think him mad.

But Gordon says that is because most people don't trouble to dissect their emotions. When they feel a strong physical attraction for a girl, nine men out of ten say, "This is love," and marry her, and find out after a few months they haven't an idea in common or view one single question from the same standpoint. He says when you've got to spend most of your time in any one's company the main essential to avoid friction is mental accord. He says if ever he finds a sensible girl who looks at things like he does, and isn't afraid to have the clothes and flesh taken off the ugly things of life and their bones exposed, he may ask her to marry him; but never, never one of these pretty girls who give him delightful collywobbles up his spine and whom he would have to talk to like a sugar doll.

He doesn't talk to me like a sugar doll anyway, does he? But he complains I have no brains, and I don't think somehow he'll ever marry. He's an unusual man, and nothing but an unusual woman would suit him, and then he wouldn't be satisfied,

for it would be just his luck for her to turn out a frump.

I think Gordon is good for me. They say I'm silly, and he does too, but I should have been much sillier if it hadn't been for him; as it is, I do think about things a little when I'm with him, anyway. I wonder what Mr. Gale would think of my having such opinions. I expect he would be shocked. He would only want me to be pretty and dainty and smiling and sugary for him to play with when he wasn't busy. I'm sure that's all he wants of girls, and that attitude makes Gordon simply furious. He says it is holding back the growth of the race.

Gordon almost objects to ordinary courtesy—conventional courtesy anyway. He says the accepted chivalry is an insult to our sex; he says the root idea of it is that a girl cannot look after herself and needs protection. The fact that she mustn't do for herself any little thing a man can do for her is tantamount to intimating her incompetence to her and showing her how lost she is without a man. "Let me do that for you," says a man; meaning, "Let me do it; I can do it so much better than you."

He has perfectly horrid ideas at times, don't you think? We have the most furious arguments about it. All the same, you mustn't think he doesn't behave like other men; he says it's against his principles, but his early training is too much for him.

Besides, I can't bear a man who is not polite in little things, and he takes some notice of what I say.

But he will never have as nice manners as Mr.

Gale. I am sure those two would never agree, so I must try not to let them clash, for I want to be friends with both. I do like Bob Gale, it's no use pretending, and I'm so glad we're going to be friends. He said we would be. You can't imagine how nice he was on Sunday. Betty is impressed, to my amazement. She told me he was lots better than my usual run, and she couldn't imagine how such a jolly boy had time for me. And mother asked me if he belonged to Robert Gale and Co., of Melbourne, and that if so she had known his mother when she was first married, and they were very nice people. So you see it's all smooth sailing at home.

I went out on the porch with him to say good-bye, just for a minute. He said I looked like a little moon-moth in my white frock under the banksia. He does talk nonsense in such an interesting way. I suppose it's his particular gift—like Gordon's for firing your soul with tales of dead heroes.

He was awfully sensible all the time, too, you know, and he only held my hand just a little tightly as he said:

"Good-night, Miss O'Dea. It was awfully kind of you to let me come."

"We're glad you could," I answered, "and, if you care to, come again."

"May I?" he said. "I'd like to."

He lifted his hat and went crunching down the gravel. I watched him, and at the bend of the path he turned round and lifted it again. Then I went inside.

But I'm so glad we're friends He has the cutest way of smiling with his red-brown eyes.

Peterjohn darling, you're going to grow up a merry-eyed man just like him, aren't you, wee imp? I'm minding him this afternoon. The nurse has gone out, and Maida is busy making him some clothes —he's in short frocks now and looks such a pet.

I wonder when I'll see him again.

CHAPTER XIX

A SURPRISE MEETING

WE went to the football to-day. It was a gorgeous game, and one of those clear sunny afternoons that make you feel like singing "Rule, Britannia," or something else warlike; and the crowd did get excited, I almost shrieked myself, once or twice, when our team nearly got a goal, and just didn't.

I knew several of the boys playing for South Sydney too, and of course that makes it more exciting. We sat right down against the fence, in the sun, the pavilion was so cold, and so when the ball came off on our side, or there was a bit of a ruck, we could see the perspiration on the men's faces and the way the muscles were standing up on their bare arms. I love it when eight or ten of them leap for the ball together, it's like seeing the spirit of battle embody itself. I love seeing men at any kind of work, there's a fascination about mere energy. And it was a fast game too, the ball seemed to fly about; but it was a good clean go, there was very little tripping and nobody was badly hurt, though Dave Davenport was knocked out for a few minutes. He got one simply frightful crack close to us; he and one of the other side, coming from opposite direc-

tions as hard as they could lick, went full tilt into each other as they reached for the ball. Dave went down like a bullock, but after one of the men had knelt beside him and rubbed his stomach a bit, he crawled up and took his kick, but he could only push it about a yard, and he had to lie down again. But he was right again in five minutes. He is a lovely player, Dave, and he's always good-tempered, even when any of the other side are laying for him. I've never heard of anybody seeing Dave cross.

And we met Mr. Gale there. I hadn't meant to go, but Marje was very keen on this particular match, and at the last minute Petermac found he couldn't go till late, so she begged me to go with her, as she wanted to be there from the beginning.

It was at quarter-time he came in, with three or four other fellows. I saw him quite accidentally as I was taking a look round to see whom I knew. I got such a shock when I saw him, for I'd never thought of his being at the football. I supposed he'd be golfing or rowing or playing hockey, and anyway, even though he came, it was ten chances to one our striking one another among all those thousands. But we did.

He saw me the same moment I noticed him, and of course I gave him a tiny smile and looked away, but from the angle at which I was sitting I could watch him out of the corner of my eyelash, and I saw him turn and say something to the fellows he was with, who were making for the smoking-pavilion. They seemed to expostulate with him for

a minute, and then they laughed and watched him thread his way down to us with interest, and the next thing I knew he was standing beside me.

"How d'ye do?" he said with the loveliest smile. "Oh, how d'ye do?" he repeated to Marjoram, whom he hadn't noticed up till then. "I was wondering if by any chance you'd be here," he added to me. "I've only just come."

"Yes, I saw you," I replied. He still stood there, and I didn't know quite what to do. I didn't know whether he wanted to stop with us or go back to his friends, and I didn't like to ask him to sit down, for he mightn't like to refuse, and perhaps he had only come down to speak for a minute. But he went on talking, and Marje in her usual blunt fashion cut the knot. Marje never sees two sides of a situation like I do, and in some ways it's handy. She now came to the rescue with :

"Hadn't you better move up, Thyme, and let Mr. Gale sit down?"

"But are you sure there's room?" he said. "I won't be crushing you, will I?"

"Of course not," I said, moving. "There's plenty of room, and we're keeping a seat for Petermac; he'll be along any minute now. But are you sure you don't want to go back to your friends?"

"Not if you'll let me stay here," he replied promptly.

And we both laughed.

It was such a nice afternoon.

"I'm awfully glad I found you," he said after a

bit. "I thought you might be here. You told me you were fond of football."

"I didn't think you would be," I answered quite truthfully. "Didn't you tell me you rowed Saturdays?"

"So I do," said he; "those were rowing fellows I came with. We had about an hour before we came, but they all had a bit of money on the match and were keen on seeing it, and—I wanted to come too, so we let the rowing slide."

"Did you?" I said, with just half a glance, and then I watched the football again. But he watched me more than the football; I could feel him.

"I love rowing," I said after a bit. "Where do you row? I should like to see you."

"Oh, we're nothing very crack," he laughed. "I haven't done much since I left college till I came to Sydney. But we're rowing a match next Saturday; if you'd like to see it I'll send you tickets for the launch that follows us."

"Thank you very much," I replied. "I'd love to." And just then I noticed him take off his hat to somebody.

"Dolly Lawrance," he said, as my eyes involuntarily went in the direction he was looking. "Haven't you seen her?"

"Not before," I said, as I too smiled at her. She was sitting a couple of rows back with the Hyleses—Lottie always comes to see every match Dave plays in. Her return greeting wasn't exactly effusive; I suppose she didn't like Mr. Gale's being with me.

"You're a great friend of Dolly's, aren't you?" I asked conversationally as I played with the clasp of my bag.

"We get on all right," he replied. "I like the whole family, but Dolly likes my brother Stan better than me."

"Is he in the business too?" I asked, more to show polite interest than because I was really curious.

He nodded. "Yes, we're both with the pater. They were going to send him over here first instead of me."

"Why didn't they?" I said as he stopped abruptly.

"Oh, well—they thought—the biggest reason was we want to keep Stan away from certain influences over here. But I'm afraid he may have to take my place soon all the same."

"Why, are you going away?" I asked, feeling horribly dismayed.

"I may have to any day," he answered. "The pater's health is uncertain just now, and the strain and worry are getting too much for him. He'll have to retire soon. He really should have done it before now, and of course that will mean readjustments. I expect I shall be needed at the head office."

"I'm sorry," I said after a short pause.

"So shall I be—now," he said with just the faintest shade of meaning. "However," he laughed again, "I'm not gone yet. The pater is still pegging along, obstinately refusing to be laid on the shelf, and I'm glad to see it."

"Then you are the elder brother?" I said.

He nodded.

"You told me you had some sisters, didn't you?"

"Two," his eyes twinkled. "Why?"

"What are they like?"

"Like?" the twinkle deepened. "Do you mean to look at? They are both fair, one's hair is redder than mine."

"No," I said; "I mean just—well, just what are they like? Are you fond of them?"

The twinkle deepened to a real smile. "I suppose I am. I haven't thought about it; one doesn't with sisters, you know."

"Well, tell me what they are like," I persisted.

"Not like you, anyway. They are nice girls of course, but I don't think you would care much about them."

"Wouldn't I?" I said. "Why?"

"Well, I can't explain exactly, but they're awfully good, you know. I haven't really seen much of them. I was a boarder at college for years, while the pater and mother had the girls brought up in England, so Stan and I hardly knew them till they came back grown up. The trouble with them is they've never had a fling. Mother holds them in too tight—I tell her so. It's funny neither she nor the pater has ever attempted to interfere with us boys since we were quite youngsters, but the girls can't call their souls their own. They are frightfully particular where they let them go, and as for letting them go to the theatre alone with any fellows but us!—you can't imagine how strictly they've been kept in. Sometimes Stan and I try to get them out a bit, but

it's only an occasional burst, and being brought up in England, they haven't any friends they've grown up with to make their own circle like you, so there they are."

"How too bad," I said sympathetically.

"It is rather, isn't it?" he agreed. "I'll tell you the sort of thing they have to put up with. They can have whom they like to the house provided the pater and mother think them suitable, but they are not allowed outside amusements like most girls, that's what I mean. Only a little before I came to Sydney a girl friend of theirs was going to England, and they arranged to give her a small farewell at Menzies in the afternoon—they'd engaged the room and everything, and then the folks at home put their foot down and made them cancel it all, said they had a big enough house to hold all the people they wanted to entertain and enough servants to carry out any orders, and they didn't see why they wanted to have it at a hotel, and it wasn't proper, etc. The girls were wild about it, I remember; it was the first time I'd seen them really rebellious. They're very good girls."

"I wonder how you came to have sisters like that," I said mischievously.

"I wonder myself at times," he said, "but Stan and I arrived first, so perhaps they got misdirected and came to the wrong house."

I couldn't help smiling to myself as I sat and thought it over. How his mamma and sisters would disapprove of me if they could see me with him this

minute! But mothers and sisters generally do disapprove of their men's taste in girls. Look at Fred —though of course that is different. They couldn't find any social objections to me, but I expect if they knew they'd tell him I was a flirt and fast and things like that.

He broke into my musings suddenly.

"Do you know when I first heard of you?" he said.

"The day you landed in Sydney," I suggested mirthfully. He had to laugh too.

"No; over in Melbourne, long before I came."

"Gracious!" I said aghast. "I didn't know my reputation extended beyond the limits of one State. Then I come under Federal jurisdiction, don't I? Don't be alarmed," I added. "I don't really know anything about it, but we pick up phrases like that from dad and use them in argument at home whether they're to the point or not; they sound so imposing. But how did you hear about me? Who from?"

"It's been puzzling me ever since I met you," he answered, "but I couldn't place you, and only last night as I was going to sleep it suddenly dawned on me. You used to know Molly Davenport, didn't you?"

"Heavens! Yes," I cried. "Molly and I were great friends till she went to Melbourne; she went to live with her married sister after the father died and the home was broken up—her mother had been dead for years. Look! that's her brother playing—number three he is, the big fellow—look—he's jump-

ing for the ball now, that's Dave. Just fancy your knowing Molly. What's she like now? She had her hair down when she went away."

"It was up when I met her. I struck her down at the 'Varsity first. I took a course in science there, as I think I told you, before I went in with the pater, and Miss Davenport tried it too for a year." His face crinkled in a smile. "She used to enliven proceedings considerably at times."

"Molly would," I said with conviction. "What did she do?"

"Oh, nothing worth recounting. One can't do anything exciting there like one can at school, for there's so little you are forbidden. The only restrictions are your own sense of decency and how much you value the dislike of your lecturers—those two keep the average student within the bounds better than any number of rules. But we had fun all the same, and of course girls working with you enliven things a good deal—that is if they're the right sort. Miss Davenport was doing first-year science when I did, and at the time there were only two other girls besides her. They sat in the front row together at lectures, and our crowd was just behind; we used to tease the life out of them *sotto voce*, but we always gave them the answers to questions that floored them, so it cut both ways. And occasionally they gave us a tea-party between lectures in their room, and we'd have songs and speeches and dancing—in the afternoon, mind you. George! we were a giddy crowd."

"What fun you must have had," I said enviously. "I wish I had brains enough to go to a University."

"Oh, you don't need brains to go there," he laughed, "only to get away, and not always then. Upon my soul, when you're down there and see the number of blithering idiots that, by sheer hard work or just luck at exams., are turned out with degrees —well, you haven't got the respect for degrees you started out with."

"Tell me more about Molly," I urged, as he was silent.

"She was the liveliest of the bunch by a long way, and she did one thing we remembered her by. You know in practical chem. we use lots of mixtures, and they keep them, or some of them, in big glass jars with little glass taps—I dare say you've seen the sort in chemist shops. Well, old Harris, that was our prof., was a careful sort of chap, and he got the notion we were being too wasteful with the distilled water—we were too, used to turn on the tap full tilt and splash it all over the place—so he half-stuffed up all the taps with wadding so that they would only trickle. We couldn't make it out the first day, and it was Miss Davenport who tumbled, and she had a brilliant idea. We pulled the wadding out of the tap farthest away from old Harris, and when he wasn't looking every one who could filled his tube at the free tap, while the others, under Harris's eye, had to wait patiently on the trickle. He could never make out why there was always such a rush for the end tap."

We were talking like this all the time, only nonsense, but it seemed to make us know each other ever so much better: little things you've done and cared about make such a cozy intimate sort of conversation, don't they?

And after the match was over he suggested we shouldn't go home, but stay in town to dinner and go to the theatre, the four of us. Marje and Petermac liked the idea, and I love impromptu things, so we did. Mr. Gale got a taxi and tore off to the box-office to get seats, while we three strolled slowly on to Paris House. I don't think I ever enjoyed a dinner more in my life, though I don't know what we ate. We had a simply lovely time, and the play afterward was perfect.

And when we said good-bye he thanked me for letting him have such a nice day. It was *he* who gave *me* one, but wasn't it sweet of him to put it that way?

He has the nicest manners of any man I ever met.

CHAPTER XX

MICKY AND VANE GO HOME

DOLLY LAWRANCE was round to dinner to-night. They are talking of taking a house at Thirroul for Easter week, and if they do, they want me to stop with them. I wonder what the gag is? Surely Dr. Philip couldn't want me to be asked. And yet if it isn't that, why me? Marjoram is more Dolly's friend than I. What a lark, great-grandchildren, if it is Dr. Philip! I wish I could find out. I must have a try. I believe he does like me a bit; he rang up and offered me seats for *Kismet* last week, but I couldn't go as I was off skating with Gordon.

I do wish the blowflies would stop buzzing, there must be going to be a change in the weather; there are a good dozen in my room, I should think. I don't know where they came from, and they are making a perfectly distracting noise and flying in the gas and burning their wings, poor sillies, then they drop on the floor and lie buzzing worse than ever. I wonder if they are screaming. Perhaps it would be kinder if I trod on them; but I can't bear to, they crack so loudly.

But it is worse when they catch in the globe of the gas, and get burnt, or sorched, or fried, or whichever it is, against the mantel. It makes me sick to

hear their sharp drone of pain; but what can I do? If I turn out the gas it will only prolong their death agony; they can't get out.

I hate death and pain—seeing it, I mean—even in flies. Why can't every one be happy always?

Poor old Vane hasn't been happy the last few days; their holiday is over, and he and Micky went back to Melbourne to-day. He has been quite melancholy for a week, but Ada seems undisturbed. I wonder how she can be so cold. I couldn't to any man, even if I didn't like him, if he liked me as much as Vane does her. I should feel so sorry I couldn't care in return that I should be almost nicer to him than if I did.

But she isn't. She takes everything he does for her as quite a matter of course, and poor Vane thinks she is the last word in girls. I think she's a brute. Isn't it extraordinary? If a man once decides he cares for a woman, she can be as cold and beastly as she likes, and he thinks it's lovely because it's her, and if he doesn't care about her, she can be a darling, and he'll never notice. But women are nearly as unreasonable too.

But how can she be so horrid to poor Vane? She wouldn't even give him one little good-bye kiss, for he told me this morning; he spent most of it sitting on the lawn in the sun with me—Fay and Micky were down the garden having a last flirt. I wouldn't mind betting Fay isn't so stingy, still she goes a bit to the other extreme, but she'll tone down in time and, anyway, who am I to go criticizing her?

Still, it's funny wondering how other girls behave with men when they are alone. I guess much the same way you behave yourself.

Vane is hugely delighted that she has promised to write to him; I wonder how often she'll do it. I wish I could make up my mind how much of her attitude is real indifference, and how much bluff. She came down to see him off, and that was a concession; she had a half-holiday from the kindergarten, so Mrs. Haste and I chaperoned the four of them down to the boat. We got a lot of fun out of it. We let them stroll about the deck alone, and just before we came off I suddenly deluged the four of them with confetti. Everybody on board was of course wildly excited and mystified, thinking they were to carry a honeymoon couple, and they couldn't understand when the two girls came off with us.

It was a huge joke, and Fay enjoyed it, but Ada was as mad as could be, and would hardly say good-bye to poor Vane; still she was one of the last to keep up waving "good-bye" till the ship was out of sight, she's a queer puzzle. But it's a frightfully tiring game seeing people off, standing about the boat and on the wharf and getting pushed and elbowed about, isn't it? But I do like to see the big ship slipping away from the side, with all the broken ribbons tangling their pink and green and yellow against her.

And who do you think we met on board? Of course we saw crowds of people we knew. One always does, it's a perfect succession of "How d'ye

do?" and "Hello, are you going too?" But in among the crowd we suddenly came upon—Mr. Gale. We both got such a shock, for the crowd nearly pushed us into each other's arms. When we disentangled and got out of the rush, and found out we were neither of us going, he told me he was down seeing his brother off back to Melbourne; he had been up to Brisbane and was on his way back. We had both lost our folks by this time, so we sat down where we were and talked on. It was the most sensible thing to do, wasn't it? If two sets of people start chasing each other round the decks they'll never meet.

Still I must admit it was some time before the others found us, and, as Fred would have put it, they smiled audibly when they saw who I was with. Then Bob's brother appeared discreetly on the outskirts of the crowd and Bob called him and introduced him all round; he is something like Bob, only bigger, a little, and his eyes are not quite so coaxing. I surprised him once looking at me pretty hard; I wonder if Bob has told him anything about me, but of course he wouldn't.

Vane seized the opportunity to draw me aside and say, "Thyme, I'm surprised at you. Where does poor Gordon come in? He needs me here, to look after you for him."

"Then you'd better stay," I laughed.

Vane's face grew sombre in a twinkling. "I wish I could," he sighed. "I just hate going. Thyme, you'll look after her for me, won't you?"

"Like a mother," I said, patting the big goose's arm. If he'd been shorter I'd have hugged him, but a girl my size can't hug a six-footer with comfort, even if he is four years younger.

But I wonder why they persist about Gordon like that? I'm sure he doesn't care about me that way.

Oh! well, they're gone now. Fay quite cried as Micky's smile faded out of view. She'll have forgotten all about him to-morrow when she sees Hudson again, but she's like me in some ways, she lives intensely in the present. Ada just said calmly that she was glad they had gone, as she might get a chance to get some work done again.

Isn't she unnatural?

Bob has asked me to go skating with him on Wednesday night. We'll go to the Glaciarum, I think, for a change. I'm getting a wee bit tired of the rollers.

CHAPTER XXI

MR. WYMONDHAM

GRACIOUS, I am tired this afternoon. I was shopping all the morning. I wanted a new coat and skirt, and I had to try every shop in town before I got one to my liking. I wanted a heather tweed, and just because I was sure I didn't want any other sort, there didn't seem to be a heather tweed in all Sydney. There were tons of stripes, and art shades, and greys, and blacks, and every other color Solomon could have fancied. I nearly wore my legs off going from one shop to another, but at last I got such a beauty. It was the only one they had. A sort of browny-green with tiny red and blue streaks in it.

Bob said once he loves girls in rough tweeds for the winter, they look so simple and warm. Mine will almost exactly match a suit of his. Won't it be a joke if we go out in them together? People will think we are married and have had them made off the same roll.

We had huge fun at the skating on Wednesday. He skates beautifully, and I am not so bad myself. I think I looked rather nice too, G.G.C., at least he said I did. Is it hard to imagine the old frump with the three chins looking nice? I wore a white cloth dress, and white doeskin boots, and white furs, so at

any rate I looked suitable and icy. Every now and then I felt him stealing glances at me, the sort of glances that make a girl positive the man she's with is glad he's there.

We met Dr. Philip there, but I didn't see Dolly. He came up to us while we were having coffee and joined us, and really I didn't mind, he was ever so much jollier than I've seen him before. Bob seems to thaw him right out, but it is so strange they should be so fond of each other; they are so unlike. We had great fun together. The three of us went round after that. He skates better than either of us, and I felt quite proud of myself, with the two most distinguished-looking men on the rink making a fuss over me. I saw Lottie Hyles looking at me enviously more than once.

But I made a fearful break as we were coming home. The three of us had supper together, and while we were sitting there Mr. Wymondham passed by with an amazingly pretty girl, dressed amazingly too. But of course that's nothing for Sydney. He didn't see us, or wouldn't, I'm not sure which, and the way she was dressed might have taught me more sense; but with what Marje calls my "usual brilliance," I said right out:

"What a lovely girl that is with Mr. Wymondham; do you know who she is?" When I was halfway through I wondered if I was putting my foot into it, and when I saw the two men exchange a scarcely perceptible glance I knew it, even before Bob replied coolly:

"No, I don't know her at all, Miss O'Dea."

I wonder if he doesn't, really? But for about five minutes I felt the most utter and complete ass ever born; yet as long as they didn't know I suppose it was all right. But I suddenly remembered who she was. Dolly Lawrance had told me about her one day when we passed her in the street; her name is Lulu Anderson, at least that's what she calls herself. Don't men and women play the hypocrite with each other? Why couldn't he have said straight out what she was? Gordon would have, but I suppose I should have felt insulted if *he* had. Training counts most after all.

We dropped the subject of Mr. Wymondham with enthusiasm, but going home Bob said to me:

"Is Wymondham a friend of yours?"

"Oh, I know him," I replied carelessly. "Why?"

Bob frowned. I love the way he frowns. "Oh, nothing, but——" Then he laughed apologetically. "It's a bit over the fence to slander a man when he's absent, but you've got brothers, haven't you? Ask them about him."

"I could ask Gordon," I said thoughtfully. "But you know him too, don't you? I've seen you together. I thought he was a friend of yours."

"Never in this life," Bob declared with quite surprising emphasis. "Men have got to mix with a lot of other men at times whom they can't stand, but I wouldn't let a sister of mine talk to him."

"Good gracious," I said, "but he goes everywhere. I meet him all over the place, at every one's parties."

"And a pretty good advertisement of our social decency it is," Bob said indignantly. "No wonder some folks say, for its size, Sydney is about the wickedest city of the globe. I know people receive him, but I'll tell you this, to me, and to a good many other fellows I know, any girl that is seen with Gus Wymondham —— Well, look here, Miss O'Dea, there's no use mincing words since we're on the subject, his reputation's blasting to a decent girl's name." There was a slight pause. "I hope I haven't offended you," he added.

I wasn't offended a bit, and I don't know why I said what I did; I suppose it was just general cussedness and a certain awkwardness.

It is an awkward subject to discuss with men, isn't it, however many pairs of gloves you put on?

And, too, it was a bit cheek on his part, warning me like that on such a short acquaintance, as if I couldn't take care of myself, but I was a bit surprised all the same when I found myself replying with dignity:

"We see a good deal of Mr. Wymondham."

"I'm sorry to hear that," Bob replied quite as coldly, and as we were at our front door by now he just wished me good-night and went.

For a minute I stood in the doorway hesitating. I could see he was terribly offended, but I didn't see why I should play the humble Griselda because he chose to presume, but when I saw him disappear round the curve of the path without once looking back, I dropped my heavy cloak and tore after him.

It was not for nothing I was captain of our school hockey team, and, in spite of tight skirts, I caught him just as he was shutting the gate.

He turned when he heard me pelting down the path, looking fearfully surprised and hurt still, and I grabbed his arm across the gate.

"Please don't be cross," I begged. "I was fearfully rude, but I didn't mean to be. I really don't like him a bit, and I never have been anywhere with him at all, honest I haven't."

"I'm sure of it," he said, still in that queer grave way. "If I thought you had ——"

"But surely," I blurted, amazed, "even if I had you couldn't think—about me —— Oh!"

"If you knew as much about Gus Wymondham as I do," he answered in the same way, "you would know I couldn't help thinking it."

Wasn't that a frightful thing to have said to one? And yet at the time it didn't seem cheek, we were both too deadly earnest. But how awful if he's as rotten as all that! I felt he was, that's why I've refused anything he's asked me to. But, if he's so bad, why does mother let him come about? I suppose because every one else does, and he seems to have money and certainly has trump connections. People forgive a lot to that, don't they?

Anyway, when we shook hands again, we felt so cozy and intimate—as if we'd been friends for years and years in that quarter of an hour.

He's coming up to-night. What shall I wear? I think my blue *ninon*, and my turquoise earrings.

Gracious! Now I come to think of it, I believe I tore the hem last time I wore it. I must stop and mend it. I'm rather a neat hand at mending. I do most of the family's when they have accidents with their clothes; I like it when it requires ingenuity so that it won't show much. I specially like things with stripes or checks, where you have to use different colored threads.

But I loathe darning stockings. Biddy says I'll die poor, because I always darn mine on my feet. Biddy's very superstitious about stockings: once she went to a party with one of hers inside out sooner than chance the bad luck of changing it. I'm sure I wouldn't. I shall never forget my feelings one night when I did something the same. I was wearing gold shoes and stockings to a dance, and, as it was a cold night, I slipped a pair of black cashmere ones over them to keep my legs warm going, and absent-mindedly forgot to take one off, and in the middle of a whirling lancers I looked down and suddenly discovered I had one black and one yellow leg, like a mediæval jester. I never felt such a complete idiot before; the whole set was chuckling.

I often wonder whether it's more awful to know you look a fool than not to know it.

I wonder if Bob and I will get much chance of a yarn to-night. Marje said the Hyleses rang up and said they are coming round, and they always want music, bother it!

I mustn't forget to ask Gordon about Mr. Wymondham.

CHAPTER XXII

TWO LETTERS

REALLY it's a bit absurd to make two entries in one day, but the post has just come, and I had to tell you I got a letter from each of the boys. Great-grandchildren, I wonder if you are as absurd now some of you are nineteen? I took them out into the garden and screamed over them, but I nearly cried too, poor dears. I do feel sorry for them. The younger you are the more things hurt; you haven't got enough perspective to see just where they fit in. When you are as old as I am you get from experience a kind of feeling that there's sure to be something pretty near as good round the corner.

But at nineteen you're positive certain there couldn't be.

I'll copy them down for you, G.G.C. Do you write such silly letters? The first is Vane's:

"DEAR THYME: "*At sea.*

"Just a few lines on our sad leave-taking. I'm feeling rotten, and I hope you're being decent to old Gordon. He is a bit of all right." (As if I didn't know that!) "We watched you all—I watched Ada—till you were out of sight and hidden from view by the smoke. Please excuse if I finish in pencil, the boat is rolling so. Then we watched dear old Sydney gradually disappear till we were outside the Heads. Then it was time for a feed. When the

feed came we had a good go in, you bet, and then they had a dance, but we were too sad to join in, so we went to bed at half-past nine. Our cabin is covered with confetti. Micky was nearly sick last night. Well, I must close now, as I want to write to Ada before we land. Don't forget to do what you promised, and let me know how she is and if any other fellow gets hanging round."

And then he adds two postscripts:

"Do let me know how she is. You have our address. You will write, won't you?"

"Don't forget to put in a good word for me sometimes, but I think things are pretty near all right for the present. You know the sort of thing to say, though."

Well, for cool impudence commend me to a youth of nineteen! Because in their eyes I am not far removed from a maiden aunt, do they think I have nothing else in life to do but help on their love affairs? Write to them indeed, like a reporter, with Max and others kicking up a shine because I haven't time for letters even to them.

All the same I suppose I will. I never could say "No" to a man, and they are both such dears. If they were a bit older I'd be in love with them myself.

Micky's letter is a bit more cheerful:

"DEAR THYME: "*Tuesday. At sea.*

"I want to thank you for the ripping holiday you and your folks helped to give us. You were a sport and a dear, and there's only one girl I love more than you, and I guess you know who that is."

(Oh, Micky, Micky, what would your little Melbourne girl say if she heard you?) "Do you think she's sorry I'm gone? Vane is frightfully glumpy; he just sits there thinking about Ada. Put in a good word for me with Fay now and again, won't you? You tell her in confidence I told you she is the *nicest girl I've ever met.* Underline it too. I am going to write to her, and she to me, but I suppose she will soon forget me. She's a flirt, isn't she?" (What about yourself, Micky?)

"Vane's face is making me feel sad—I mean sadder—and all the parties we've had lately are not a good thing for me with this choppy sea. But I'm not sick yet. There is no one nice on board. I saw a pretty girl go past just now, but Vane is so miserable, I don't suppose I shall get a chance to speak to her.

"I wish Fay were here. We would have fun, wouldn't we? I had better ring off; I sound like a love-sick tomcat. I will stop and write to her now. Good-bye, Thyme, again.

"Your most sincere friend,

"MICKY MCEWEN.

"P. S.—Vane has given you our address, hasn't he? We go up to the station in a few days."

Of all calm cheek! But I had to laugh. So your rôle in life apparently, Thyme, my dear, is that of a good-natured policeman. Do you really look as old as that? Let's get to the mirror. No, you don't, Thyme, honesty compels me to deny it.

I must tell Bob about the kids. He will laugh.

But I suppose I shall write, as if I hadn't got enough letters already.

Drat that Max!

CHAPTER XXIII

IN THE GARDEN

OH, we did have such a nice time last night, G.G.C., Bob and I. You needn't sniff, my dears; he has asked me to call him Bob. It sounded funny at first, but I'm getting used to it. I'm so glad he did. I was afraid we weren't going to get a chance to speak to each other, but my luck held. Lottie Hyles came round alone—at the last moment her brother had to go to a rowing meeting—so Marje and Petermac and Fred and she played bridge. I was afraid Fred wouldn't at first, for he's supposed to stew most nights he isn't at dances, but I slipped up to his den, when I saw how the land lay, and begged him to come and say he wanted to play, otherwise Bob would have had to make a fourth and I would have had to stand out.

Fred and I do each other good turns on occasions, so he came; besides, he rather likes Lottie, and that of course left me and Bob free to do what we liked, and we liked to go into the garden, but we couldn't, for Betty came and talked to us. She has been seized with a violent admiration for Bob—it's the funniest thing I've ever seen; she'll let him say anything to her. She told me to-day she wished I'd marry him,

because she would like him for a brother-in-law, but she kindly added she didn't suppose I'd ever get the chance, not if he had any sense.

She monopolizes the conversation too when she does talk. I couldn't get a word in edgewise. It was amusing for a bit, but I began to think soon she intended to chaperone us the whole evening. You see, neither of us felt we knew the other well enough to suggest openly that two is a perfect number, and Betty is impervious to hints.

However, Ada came to the rescue like an angel. I never would have believed she'd be so observant, for she never wants to be alone herself. Still, she knows I'm different, and, although she disapproves, since the episode of Vane she seems to have a certain degree of sympathy. So in response to my agonized eyebrow she called Betty out of the room on some pretext or another, and we seized the opportunity with both hands and feet and sloped into the garden.

Of course I made him suggest it.

But it was, as he said, too lovely a night to spend indoors. We went and sat under the old pepper-tree by the east corner of the veranda. It's a most private spot, sheltered on almost three sides by a high pittosporum hedge which prevents one (or rather two) being awkwardly surprised, and at night the pittosporum smells glorious. The family have nicknamed it "Thyme's Corner"—just like their cheek! But if it could talk, dear old place—I'm glad it can't. Think if it had started in to tell Bob

that was where Max and I said our last good-bye. I had another letter from him to-day, rather a mad one too, worse luck. Marje says I ought to stop his thinking things like that, but how can I? I could only by telling him there's some one else, and there isn't really. Nobody special.

Bob said it was the loveliest place he'd ever seen. We sat there till supper. I wonder if he liked it as much as I did. I think so. We talked about all sorts of things, and he told me more of his mother and when he was at the 'Varsity and his men friends in Melbourne. He said at first he hated coming over here away from them all. And I told him about the family and when we were kids up at Willibindi, and how they always say at home I'm silly; and he said in the loveliest voice:

"Not a silly little girl; a dear little girl."

And I was actually tongue-tied. Fancy Thyme O'Dea without a word to say! But I think it is his eyes make me feel shy. And there would be long silences, and they seemed cozier than talking, and just now and again, like the orchestra filling in snatches of the heroine's soliloquy, Bob accompanied the underground chitter of the earth with remarks. His voice is like a 'cello, and it has the strangest, most musical vibrations in it at times; it seems to clutch your heart and twist round it. And the moon hit straight through the pepper leaves and made fairy patterns on my frock and, round the shade the tree threw, a white half-circle on the grass. It was exactly as if Diana—jealous old maid

she is—was trying to ferret us out with a forty horse-power arc light.

Of course we had to go in with the rest at supper, and Fred tipped me a brotherly wink. I suppose I'll have to do something for him now—perhaps back him up in a few more lies when he wants to go out with his shop-girl.

I walked down to the gate with Bob to say good-bye—Marje was on ahead with Petermac—and he gave my fingers such a hard squeeze, it made my rings cut into my flesh, and I had to bite my lips to keep from exclaiming. But I like him to hurt me. I can understand in a way how women can love men who knock them about. And he said simply, "Good-night," and then after a pause, in a way that made the word sing, "Thyme."

And he went. He always says the right thing and goes at the right moment, and I listened until the last click of his footsteps had grown thin in the sharp air.

Gordon came round to-night, and the family, singly and collectively, started in to tell him all about it. They think I'm in love with Bob, and haven't the least objection to putting their thoughts into words. I don't mind that—I'm used to the family—but what I would like to know is how much he cares about me. I wonder if he does. Do you know, great-grandchildren, I believe I would rather like to marry him. I never met a man I felt that way about before, although I've been in love with heaps. I wonder if he ever will be your great-grandpapa? But I don't suppose it will interest

you much who he was, one will be as good as another to you this far back, but I tell you it makes quite a considerable difference to your great-grandma.

I wonder if I could make him want to marry me? Gordon says any woman can have any man she likes if she pursues him vigorously enough, or eludes him —either does. He says there are two ways for a woman to get what she wants. Either chase it for all she is worth, or run from it in the same manner. It depends on the man. A girl used simply to throw herself at his greatest pal, and he used to laugh about her like anything to Gordon, but she's Mrs. Pal now all the same. I wonder will I ever be Mrs. Bob?

I don't think the family need have given Gordon quite such full and complete details all the same; but you should have seen Fay and Fred give a demonstration of our parting at the gate—according to their notion of it of course. But Bob isn't a bit like that when you know him; he's never tried once to kiss me since that night I refused him.

Sometimes I wish he would.

Gordon lay back in his armchair with his lazy length sprawling all over it, and watched me out of his specs. I do wish he wouldn't wear them; he has such nice eyes without, and he doesn't need them really, except for reading, and I always pull them off when I can. I don't believe he quite liked all they were saying about Bob, although he only laughed lazily once or twice, so I gave him my version later on.

I always tell Gordon about my affairs, and he never seems to mind—we are only pals, you see. People who say platonic love isn't possible don't know what they are talking about.

I asked him about Mr. Wymondham too, and I was quite amazed, for he got nearly as stirred up as Bob had, and Gordon rarely says anything nasty about anybody. But he said Mr. Wymondham is the most rotten rotter that ever rotted, or words to that effect, and he thought the same as Bob that it was a pretty bad advertisement for a girl to be seen alone with him.

"See here, Thyme," he said in the end, "I don't pretend to be a shining ornament in the saint line myself, but I'd sooner be classed with hogs than with that man. I'm not going into details—they wouldn't sound pretty, besides it's not my business. I'll tell you one thing, though I don't suppose it matters, for he makes no secret of it. He travels a fair bit round the coast, as you maybe know"—I nodded—"what for, he and his father the devil alone know, though he says it's business, and he makes it a boast, among men of course—a boast, though—that he never makes a trip without a liaison with some girl on board. That's the sort of man he is."

"Oh," I breathed.

Gordon got up abruptly. "I'm sorry to have to tell you things like that," he said, "but you asked me, you know. And now let's talk of something else."

No wonder Bob hopes he's not a friend of mine.

But I can hardly believe it. He looks quite demure and proper and English, as a rule, and he can be charming, they say, though I never found him so. He always irritated me—at least, no, to be honest, I remember in that old letter I found to Maida I raved over him. What a fool I must have been!

Oh, dear, it seems a week since I saw Bob, and it was only yesterday. Oh, I forgot to tell you, my dears, the Lawrances have got a house at Thirroul, and we are going down next week. I hope it will be fun. I wonder who else will be going. I couldn't ask Dolly, for she only rang up on the 'phone this afternoon to say it was all arranged, and she was in a hurry, so I couldn't ask questions.

I must remember to-morrow morning to drop poor Vane a line to tell him how Ada is. I believe she misses him, although she'd die sooner than confess it. But she likes me to talk about him, and that's a confession in itself. So I do most obligingly. I'm a good-natured fool, that's what's the matter with me.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE MOST EDUCATING THING IN THE WORLD

I'VE been down at Maida's all day. I haven't been neglecting her lately, although you might think so from my not putting down anything about her, but nothing particular has happened to tell. But they did make fun of me to-day there. My darling Peterjohn was so fretful I wondered aloud if he could be cutting a tooth, and Maida, when she heard me, sat down and howled with laughter. When she recovered enough for speech she informed me witheringly he couldn't have teeth for months yet, babies don't till they are six months at least. She needn't have been so conceited about it, as I told her; I bet she only learned that lately. I suppose she asked the doctor. She didn't know any more about babies than I did before Peterjohn was born. It's just beautiful the way she and Jack try to pretend, nowadays, there isn't anything about domestic life they couldn't give you points on, but I soon take the stuffing out of them with a few retrospective remarks.

But you can almost hear Peterjohn grow. He is getting a big boy, and I love him. I was telling Bob all about him the other day, but I don't think he was

very interested, although he tried to look it. Men don't seem to care about quite small babies until they belong to them, do they?

Oh! and while we're talking of Bob, great-grandchildren, what do you think is the latest? He is coming to Thirroul with us next week. Isn't it lovely? But I don't suppose we shall get much of a chance of being together; I think Dolly means him for herself. At least it looks that way to me. Mrs. Lawrance asked him to join them when he was round there the other night. Isn't it absurd? I know their families are great friends, yet I feel as jealous as can be whenever he mentions casually that he's been round there. And I'm nearly certain he doesn't like Dolly as much as me, either, but I can't help feeling I wish he didn't like her at all.

It looks as if I'm for Dr. Philip after all, G.G.C., for the only other people going, besides Bob and me, are Lottie Hyles and Dave Davenport, and everybody knows they have been fond of each other for years, so they will pair off, and as you can't expect Dolly to bask in her brother's society, it's pretty obvious the way we four will have to divide.

Isn't it aggravating? It makes me wish he wasn't going. I was rather pleased at first at the idea of having Dr. Philip, for most girls would envy me being made a fuss over by him, but if I've got to watch Bob being nice to Dolly all the time it will spoil every bit of it.

He looked so fearfully pleased too when we found

out each other was going. He only said, "That's good," but the way he said it sounded like, "It's the most scrumptious bit of news that ever was."

I wonder how he'll like it when he finds out he's booked for Dolly. I hope he'll be vexed.

I rather enjoyed myself half an hour ago. Ada came strolling into my room. I was just getting out my pen to write to you, G.G.C. She didn't seem to want anything in particular (I believe she did ask me if I could lend her a darning needle), but she was in no hurry to go. She sat herself down on my bed and began to chat in a desultory fashion. For a while I couldn't see the point, and when, of a sudden, it dawned on me, I had to turn my back a second, till I could smother my smile. Do you know what it was, G.G.C.? I believe she was feeling a bit lonely, and wanted to talk about Vane, and I'm the only one who never really makes fun of her when she feels serious about it, and I don't chuck up at her later on anything she tells me.

But I did smile to myself—the haughty Ada feeling tender! Of course she wouldn't have admitted it. But she said she had had a letter from Vane, and he was feeling a bit doleful and sent his love to me. I beamed at her sympathetically, and at my suggestion she read me parts of the letter. I think it must have been rather tender in tone, for she stopped abruptly in the middle of some phrases and looked slightly pink.

I simply can't imagine any one having the pluck to be tender with Ada, but she doesn't seem to mind,

does she? I suppose these icy girls are the same as us underneath.

You know I think this affair has improved Ada wonderfully, although dad says he'll smack her and send her to bed if he hears of any nonsense from his triplets yet a while. Marje and I are quite enough for any self-respecting parent to get gray hairs over.

But love is good for any one, I think. It's the most educating thing in the world. If I could, I should insist on every one falling in love at least three times under thirty, we should have a lot less stupidity and mistakes in the world. Why, you learn diplomacy, tact, sympathy, how to be really happy, for the time anyway, practical insanity which has done half the great things of the world, poetry, music, human nature—in fact love.

I've never been sorry for being in love with any one yet. You learn something fresh each time; but of course it doesn't do to take it *too* seriously. I always see some humor in it, however badly I feel. One can't be too thankful for a sense of humor, do you think?

But I feel more and more aggravated about Thirroul every time I think of it; if only some one else was going who could possibly distract Dolly, but Dave won't be a bit of use, he and Lottie are far too absorbed in each other. I wonder why the Lawrances asked them, perhaps because Lottie is a kind of relation. One often has to ask relations when one would sooner have some one else. They won't add much to the gaiety of the party either. Dave

won't, anyway, he is terribly quiet, and shy too—a bit. He's beginning to get over it now, but when he was a boy ! !

Yes, old Dave *was* shy in those days. I mean when he was still at college, he used to be my boy then, at least he wanted to be, but he was a bit too slow for me. He used to sit on the lawn and gaze at me, and when his passion (presumably) reached boiling point he used to tickle my ear with a bit of grass.

That was daring for Dave.

Shy men are a nuisance. If a man is too bold you can snub him, and that's such a nice little pat to your vanity ; but when you've got to do all the daring for him you might as well set up a teddy-bear and talk to it. I used to tolerate him because he was such a fine-looking boy, and a prefect, and captain of the school football, and perhaps—yes, perhaps, it was a wee bit to make another boy jealous. That's an awfully old feminine trick, isn't it? But then love is such an old game itself ; it's really impossible to be original in it.

But I often smile to myself when I look at him and Lottie. It is rather funny to see the men who've been mad over you mad over other girls. It's annoying, too, in a way ; you have a feeling that once having tried you, so to speak, it's impossible any other girl could ever completely satisfy them. Women have all got a pretty good opinion of themselves.

Oh, dear ! I ought to stop and sew, I've tons to

do. I want a new beach frock before next week. I got some rather pretty stuff to-day, a greeny greyey blue with red spots in it ; it sounds weird, but it looks nice all the same.

I wonder if Bob will like it.

CHAPTER XXV

A BONZA FINISH

THANK gracious yesterday is done! It was the most awful day that ever was; I think it must have got out of the sky on the wrong side. To start with, dad gave us all a lecture in the morning—on politics, I mean—and he insisted on my attending, though I was dying to finish a new petticoat I had started before I had to begin fixing lunch. There are wretched elections next week, and referenda too to be voted on. I'd like to scrag that Labor Government; it's mad on getting centralization of power and is continually trying to bamboozle the people by different wordings to give it to them, though they've voted against it strongly. Perfect nuisance too wasting the citizens' time making them go to the polls, to keep repeating they know their own minds when they might be doing so many other things. Of course we shall all have to go—dad sees to that. He says polling day is the one time he realizes that a big family has its uses.

But imagine! He actually suggested that I should take a turn with one of the cars that go round collecting people to take them to vote, as if I had nothing else to do with my time. Dad was wild when I said I wouldn't, but Marje saved me from being a

gory corpse by offering to go in my place, though she is busy too. But Marje is rather keen on politics ; she can talk to dad about them quite intelligently; we others just hold our breath and look on.

The only bright spot in the day was Bob. I met him, though I wished him miles farther when I first set eyes on him. I've seen him nearly every day this last week. Things happen that way sometimes, don't they ? especially if you try to help them happen. The night before last Ada and I met him just before dinner ; we were taking a stroll round the neighborhood, and he came along in his car. He pulled up when he saw us, and had a yarn, and he coaxed us to get in and go for a short run with him. I asked him what he was doing round our neighborhood, and he said he was just out for a run ; he wasn't going anywhere in particular, and happened to get round this way in his travels.

Then we caught each other's eye and laughed. It's funny how men like to have a look at the neighborhood of a girl if they can't see the girl herself. I've noticed the symptom before.

But yesterday I could have died of shame. I took young Peterjohn to Coogee for the afternoon. He had been fretful the day before, and Maida thought some sea air would do him good ; and she wanted to go shopping, and it was the nurse's day out, so I stepped heroically into the breach and offered to take him. So behold me setting out, clad spotlessly in a white frock and big white hat, and Peterjohn all in white too, looking a perfect cherub. Everybody

thought he was a love on the tram and that I was his mother, and I swelled with pride at the complimentary glances cast at him just as if I had been.

But oh! you should have seen us coming home. He got one of his naughty fits, and howled and shrieked till I could have wept myself with mortification. Oh! he did behave badly. He made a frightful noise, and one woman kept looking impatiently in my direction, and I heard her mutter something about noisy brats and they should be kept at home. And I went scarlet and more scarlet, and my dress got crumpled from the way he wriggled on me, and when I cuddled him up close to try and quiet him, he wound his fingers in my hair and half-pulled it down. I don't know what on earth I looked like! I suppose "disreputable" would not have covered it by half.

I never was so glad to get out of anything as that car when it reached Circular Quay, and I looked desperately about for a taxi, but there wasn't one in sight, and I couldn't see a policeman, and at that moment the Watson's Bay car stopped beside me, so I thought I'd chance it and get in. Peterjohn had stopped yelling as soon as we got out of the other car, and it was high time he was home in bed. But it seemed he was only laying for me, for I'd no sooner entered our own car than he started performing again. I could have gone through the floor. I didn't know what to do. I tried everything. I dandled him, I shook him, I petted him, I scolded him, I even tried to half-smother him with his shawl,

to the visible indignation of an old lady sitting opposite. Oh! I can see the funny side of it now, but I tell you at the time, to be sitting in a crowded car looking as if you had been pulled through a bush backward, and nursing a baby screaming at the top of its voice, and with half the people pitying you and the other half exasperated—well, there are lots of things more enjoyable.

And to add the last finishing stroke to our disreputableness, Peterjohn was sick—it doesn't sound elegant, but babies aren't elegant in their manners, except in books—and it went all down the front of my dress as well as his own. That was the last straw. I was never so humiliated in my life. If I could have gone any redder, I would have, but I couldn't. And, to crown all, who should walk into the car that identical minute but Bob!

I felt so ashamed and dirty and horrible that I wouldn't look at him. I hoped he wouldn't notice me, but he did of course, and came and sat down next to me. I call it positively heroic, considering how Peterjohn and I both looked. And he was so jolly and matter-of-fact about it, somehow I felt better in a second. He just said as he sat down and surveyed the mess:

"You seem to have a contract on here. Shall I hold him for you a bit while you straighten yourself?"

"Oh, he's too dirty," I said. "Besides, could you?"

"Gracious, yes," he said. "I've handled kiddies

before now. Come on, old chappie," and he took him up quite deftly, yells and all. Then he handed me his hanky, saying it was a more sensible size than mine, and in a minute I had mopped myself up and straightened my hair with a pin or two, once I had my hands free and could get to my bag, and in a twinkling I looked almost tidy again.

G.G.C., I could have hugged him. I reckon he was an out-and-out brick; not every man by a long chalk would have come and claimed acquaintance under those conditions. He could easily have pretended not to see me in that crowd, and I shouldn't have blamed him either; and whether it was Peter-john liked his arms better than mine or felt happier after being sick, I don't know, for he stopped crying and went to sleep. Bob wouldn't give him back to me then for fear of waking him, and he got out of the car with me; and I'm sure, from the benevolent way several people regarded us, they thought we were his mamma and papa. One man even said as we stepped out, "You've a fine boy," and Bob chuckled and I blushed. I felt such a fool.

He insisted on carrying him to Maida's for me, and when I protested it was taking him out of his way, he said he had only been going to Lawrances'. He had thought he'd drop in there to dinner, but they weren't expecting him, so it didn't matter. Maida interpreted my look correctly when we restored her erring son to her, and asked him to stay to dinner. He refused at first; he wanted to, but he didn't like to—you see he had only met her once—

but I explained this was my second home, and Maida said that by the time he got to Lawrances' dinner would be over, especially as they weren't expecting him, and wouldn't be disappointed if he didn't turn up, and Jack clinched the matter by strolling in and saying that if everybody didn't come to dinner soon, and stop arguing, he'd eat the lot he was so hungry. So of course he stayed; he wanted to all the time.

And it was so jolly and picnicky feeling, just the four of us. We kept laughing at nothing at all, we all seemed so happy, and Maida and I cheeked each other, and the men seemed to get on well. And we played bridge after dinner, and Bob and I beat them hollow, and then he took me home. It was *bonza*, the finish up.

And Maida said I was quite right when I told her all that had happened; he was a perfect dear.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE SECRET PLACES

WHY on earth is everybody Gordon-mad? Even Maida tackled me about him to-day. I was surprised, though we can say anything to each other naturally. But this afternoon in the middle of darning a sock she looked up abruptly, when I told her I was going skating with Gordon, and remarked:

"Timmy" (that's Maida's own very pet name for me, no one but her is ever allowed to use it; she gave it to me when we were at school). "Timmy, don't you think you are going a bit strong with Gordon now, that is if you mean to have the copperhead?"

I was so astounded I simply gaped at her for the minute. "My dear kid," I said at length, "I don't mean to have either; at least, of course Bob mightn't ever want me, and I'm positive Gordon won't."

"Humph!" Maida commented.

Good gracious! *Can* Gordon be in love with me? Oh, rot! it's conceit to imagine it for a minute. He hasn't time for marriage; he says so. He says too he'd be sorry for any girl that did marry him—he is such an erratic rolling stone. So should I. He has the queerest ideas about marriage too; they wouldn't suit me, not some of them anyway. He says he would consider his wife his equal in all things, and

if he got on his ear or played her false, he couldn't, as a mere matter of justice, complain if she did the same. And he would expect her to work, the same as himself. He's like dad, who doesn't believe in women being idle, only he's more so. He says it's downright wrong for a man to strain every nerve to keep a woman in idleness, it's overtaxing the man and at the same time spoiling the woman's development, for the human race progresses only by work. He believes in everybody working. He doesn't think there ought to be anybody rich enough not to have to.

But I believe he'd be a lot nicer to a woman than he pretends, all the same. Down deep he's fond of them. I remember one night at the beginning of the summer. We were lying on the beach at our back gate about sundown, and we got to talking about love and women and things, and Gordon admitted he had a streak of romance in him, only he rarely let it get loose. It was that funny half-gloomy time of day that makes you confess things you wish you hadn't afterward. I remember his saying that at times he wished he wasn't so suspicious and could let himself go like other men. He said that sometimes he felt he'd like a woman to love him so much that if he died she'd find life unbearable and poison herself, or never smile again, or go mad, or something like that. He laughed at himself even while he said it.

"You'll think me an idiot, Thyme," he said, "and it is idiotic and silly and vain and egotistical and

downright ludicrous, and she would be a hateful sort of woman who would, and I hope I never meet her, and yet, do you know"—he made a comic grimace at me—"I'd rather like to."

But when I asked him why he didn't get married if he felt like that, he said because he felt like that was the reason he didn't.

Isn't he queer?

But he went on to explain that he preferred to be a looker-on at the game of love. "The critic, Thyme," he said, "can judge and weigh unbiased, but if he enters the arena himself he loses his pleasure of discrimination. Besides, I can't delude myself enough for it. Marriage and love are mostly delusion. Most men marry some particular sort of girl because they fancy she is some other sort. And, lastly, can you imagine any girl being fool enough to marry me, for I can't."

"Oh, yes I can," I protested, "if only you weren't so—so unfeeling; at least, that's not it, so—so ——"

"No, I'm not unfeeling," Gordon broke in as I hesitated, "I'm just the opposite, but I'm the unfortunate victim of a passion for analysis. I dissect everything, especially my own emotions, and that of course is the dead finish to them. The average man, when he feels he loves a girl, says contentedly, 'This is *it*,' and wades in and enjoys himself; but when I feel that way I say to myself, 'Am I sure it's *it*, and if so, why so, etc.?' The trouble is I've got too much imagination, and imagination can be the death as well as the birth of love."

I've given up trying to understand him.

"But, Gordon," I said, "you wouldn't like your wife to be a drudge, would you? If you knew how I hate housework," I added pathetically.

"But you like cooking and sewing," he pointed out.

"But I don't suppose I would if I could afford not to."

"All the more reason your husband should see you couldn't afford not to," Gordon retorted unfeelingly. "A woman ought to do her whack, the same as every one else. If men troubled to analyze their motives, most of them would find the main reason they support their wives and daughters in idle luxury is because it reflects glory on themselves: it is a proof to the world of their success or wealth. I don't believe any of us, men or women, were put into this world to be parasites on our fellows. And the women who work are, nine times out of ten, happier. I mean work, of course, not drudge; drudgery is as bad as idleness. I think the happiest woman I ever knew was a Mrs. MacCormack, who lived near our camp in the west. She used to look after her six kids, do all the housework, feed four adults, and cook for five shearers, and she did it singing. But of course I reckon she had it a bit too thick."

"I'm glad you think that," I said sarcastically. "Men so seldom consider that housework is anything but a delicate amusement for an unoccupied half-hour."

"Rubbish!" Gordon contradicted. "There's not much you can teach me about a house. Why, all the time I was in the west I washed and mended my own clothes and did most of the cooking for the camp. I was a dab at stews and curries and fried kangaroo. I tell you a kangaroo steak cooked by yours truly is not bad, so you needn't turn up your nose more than heaven meant it should, Miss O'Dea. I kept the three rooms of our hut as clean as—well, as clean as possible. Sunday was the day for sweeping and dusting. Why, I've spent a whole Sunday afternoon sitting over the wash-tub cursing at the clothes that *wouldn't* come clean. The only thing I barred was scrubbing; I'd never gotten down to it before that day at Maida's."

We both laughed at the recollection. We were arguing about it again coming home from the skating rink, and as we were saying good-bye at the gate Gordon said suddenly to me, in just the same way in which he informs me I'm losing a hair-pin:

"Thyme, you are getting prettier than ever."

I only made a little grimace, but I felt frightfully pleased, for if Gordon says it it must be true.

He leaned his arms on the gate and rested his chin on them and stared at me. He looked such a giant in the half-shadow of the magnolia tree, and he said slowly:

"Do you know what you remind me of, Thyme? —a verse of Richardson's:

"'The fine line makes a perfect arc
Above the level brows,
No lily mates the swift white throat
That e'er in garden grows,
Her little parted lips make pale
The red heart of the rose.'

"I like that last line especially. Your lips are gloriously red, Thyme; you don't color them, do you?"

I just gasped, but before I could recover enough presence of mind to slay him, he dragged his watch out.

"Heavens!" he said, "I'm years late. There'll be a row at the office. I've got to work all night now. Good-bye, kid."

And in a minute he had vanished.

Isn't he a queer old thing?

Ida says he's in love with me, too, but that he doesn't know it because he doesn't want to marry. He doesn't, you know. He likes to wander round the world, just as the humor takes him, and he couldn't do that if he had a wife and children expecting him to bring home the necessary sixpence on Saturday night. Ida thinks he is so firmly convinced he doesn't want to settle down that he never realizes he's thinking of a woman that way, even when he suspects he loves her a bit. I think she's nearly right, don't you?

We had rather a bonza yarn to-night. I never met a woman so interesting to talk to as she is. I think her charm is that she isn't in the least afraid to say what she thinks, and she thinks in a way all

her own. It's rather exciting at times: she reminds me of a beef olive—you never know, till you bite on it, whether it's going to taste of seasoning or meat. And there's plenty of seasoning with her. Even Gordon admits she's fascinating, in fact when he was talking of her the other day I felt almost jealous. He said she had a strong physical appeal to men to start off with, she was three-quarters that and so not out of the common, but the fourth quarter of her was brain, and that, on top of the other, was what made her a problem. Goodness only knows why she likes talking to me; perhaps for the same reason Gordon does, that I'm a good audience.

She says it's because I'm so delightfully young. And when I pointed out she wasn't many years older herself, she crossed her pretty feet and sighed. "It isn't years make age, Daytime," she said, "it's feelings. If we were the same age it wouldn't make any difference; you've got the spirit of it and I haven't now. I had once, but I think it died in me when I found out about Lester. I don't suppose you understand; of course I am young still, and I feel it, at times, but the flame of youth died in me, the fine frenzy of it, the joyous carelessness. You've got that hugely, and I had it too when I married. I was only a youngster, Thyme, and then—you see it made a woman of me suddenly. It came upon me so cruelly, so suddenly cruelly, that life was serious. Ever since that night life's been a bit of a task, even when I'm happy, never the delicious joke it used to be. I lost then, for good I suppose, the take-no-

thought kind of feel, the sense that to-morrow's sure to have an unexpected bit of fun up its sleeve.

"Oh, Daytime! What wouldn't you have given to have been a Greek? Fancy to have really believed in Bacchus, to have heard him piping dimly in the blue shadows of the morning, and to have followed him barefoot, breathless, till he found for you the secret places of your soul."

Her voice dropped to a kind of croon as she said this, and she stared through the window to the dark wetness outside. "Oh, Daytime!" she said softly, "the wonder in this old world that we never see. We're the only things that spoil it, and we're the only things that can see it."

She went on staring outside, with her eyes growing bigger and bigger. "Come here, Daytime," she said, still in her queer, croony voice. "Come and look. See the almond trees watching us there, how still they are, like a dawning thought against the tyranny of the dark: see the petals flutter, flutter down, like little pink good wishes, to lie in dim drifts along the paths, soft and silent. You cannot see my stocks now, the corner there is full of them; when the sun wakes to-morrow they will rise up to clothe afresh my jaded mind, a garment of rose and cream and purple. And next to them are the violets, blue and delicate. Press one to your lips, it will not shrink from you, like your fellow men and women, because they are hot and ashamed—even the frosted grass is pure."

She was silent again a little. "Oh, the magic of

the world, the glory, and cruelty, and purity, and lust of it! Daytime, why was I born a woman? Why was I born to love? I can't help it, Daytime, I can't. I can't live without love. I hate myself and life for it, but I can't help it."

I do love it when she talks like that, and just in the middle Lance Lester and a couple of other men came in and spoilt it all, so I went home.

I wonder what Bob would think of her. She says she's never met him. I wonder if she really hasn't. I suppose that's a queer thing to say, but Ida doesn't always quite tell the truth, and, somehow, I fancied after I had been telling her about him, and asked casually if she knew him, that she hesitated a bit before she answered "No." I suppose it was just imagination, for why should she lie about it? But still, great-grandchildren, it does seem queer that there should be a check signed R. H. Gale lying on her desk, doesn't it?

I saw it to-night, when I was getting a stamp for her. She said it was her husband's—a business check—but it seemed to me she was rather anxious to convince me that it was her husband's; why should she think I'd need convincing? I don't know why I should be thinking about it like this, it's certainly none of my business —— I wonder whether there was ever anything between her and Bob, and she thinks I might be jealous of her if I knew. I'm not such an idiot.

Gracious! I have an imagination. I suppose she's telling the truth, and that's why it sounds peculiar; truth really often does sound the most unlikely explanation.

CHAPTER XXVII

VOTING DAY

TO-DAY is voting day. Such a beastly nuisance. I hate voting, and I don't know many women who don't. It seems queer those English suffragettes should be so crazy about it, it won't be much use to them when they do get it, most women vote just about as their husbands or fathers tell them.

Gordon voted for Labor, or said he was going to, but I shan't tell dad, he would be so mad. Gordon's a Socialist, so he says, but it's hard to know exactly what any one means by that now there are so many brands, isn't it? I think he's just the sort that believes in equal opportunity, or something like that. He gave me a real old lecture when I grumbled about voting. He told me I ought to be ashamed of myself for not appreciating my privileges as a citizen. He admires the English suffragettes because they are fighters, he says they are going neck or nothing for what they want, and there are so few people in this world who even know what they want, let alone go for it. He says women as a rule are a jolly sight too meek, they don't insist enough on their rights as human beings. But he really isn't very consistent there, for not so very long ago when we were having a discussion on natural rights (our dis-

cussions, G.G.C., are a lecture by Gordon with me for audience and interrogatory) he told me that the only natural rights of a man in a community were those his community decided were fit and proper he should have.

I said I didn't want any old rights if they weren't given to me, and I wouldn't make an exhibition of myself like the suffragettes do and forget all womanly decency, but Gordon upheld them for all he was worth; he says they are fighting for an ideal, and that in itself is uplifting (fancy calling smashing innocent peoples' windows and burning their houses and smacking policemen's faces "uplifting"!).

"Women are just waking up," he said, "once they make up their minds what they want—all of them and not only the enlightened minority—they will get it, you simply can't stop them. To want, that's life. To be always seeking. But women don't seek; the objective of most of them is marriage and they just drift toward that. The awful placidity with which the average girl waits for it—why, I even admire more the girl who schemes and plans for an advantageous match than the girl who takes the first chance that comes her way. At least the first girl is working, even if in an ignoble way. Every one should be interested and working at something, should have some object and go for it baldheaded."

It amused me the different way Bob treated me when I talked about it to him. He said:

"It's just too bad such a dear little head should be bothered with questions like that, isn't it? I don't

think women ought to have the vote"—he glanced sideways at me to see the effect of his heresy—"but, seriously, I don't think it's a woman's province at all, do you? Her duties lie elsewhere."

I looked non-committal. "What do you think a girl's duty is, then?" I demanded.

He laughed. "Why, to love pretty things and look as nice as she can, and when she has done that it is a man's duty to admire her. There is no nicer sight in the world than a pretty girl prettily dressed. That frock makes your eyes look like forget-me-nots," he added.

Sometimes, though, I wish Bob didn't think looks are the only thing that counts. Because I don't think I'm altogether stupid. I can understand things if they are explained to me, even politics. I was quite interested in an article in the *Bulletin* dad read us last night. It was on strikes, and one couldn't help being interested, there have been so many lately in Sydney. As the article starts off, "Everybody in and around Sydney is, or has been, or soon expects to be on strike." That gas strike was perfectly awful the other week, you couldn't go out at nights at all, and then the ferry strike on top of that was a delicate finish, since you couldn't go out in the daytime either, at least not those on the North Shore; it didn't affect us at Rose Bay, and of course we had our own motor-boat if we did want to cross the harbor. But the train strike on the heels of that was the limit. Three separate public strikes all in a few weeks—what do you think of that, G.G.C.?

The article opposed the strikes. Dad was immensely tickled with it, the more so as the *Bulletin* is generally considered to favor Labor, but the situation, as the paper put it, is a bit humorous. It said :

"At present the Labor Party owns Parliament and the Government of New South Wales. Through them it bosses the railways. Through them also it controls the whole machinery of Industrial Arbitration, which was devised to make strikes unnecessary, illegal, and impossible, and it is on chronic strike against arbitration. If unionism believes that the strike—the simple old device of industrial warfare—is the best way of settling differences, then it should call on its Ministry and its Parliamentary majority to wipe all arbitration devices off the local statute book. Then the position would be clear and honest."

I really enjoyed dad's reading that, I think it was so clever and sarcastic, don't you, G.G.C.? I love sarcasm, and really strikes are most inconvenient and upsetting.

I must stop now and pack my suit-case; we are going down to Thirroul to-morrow morning. I hope it will be fine, we are going to motor there; if the weather is anything like to-day it ought to be great, and I love going through the Bulli Pass, with its thick green of trees and palms on either hand, and then coming out full to the view of the sea rocking beneath you.

My beach frock looks so nice, and I have made myself the sweetest afternoon frock of white sponge cloth, with a blue tie and buttons. Blue does suit

me best. Oh! I do hope our Easter will be fun. I wonder if anything exciting will happen. Isn't it fun wondering about things beforehand? They are never like you expect.

Well, bye-bye, G.G.C.

CHAPTER XXVIII

AT THIRROUL

IT'S simply gorgeous down here; we've only been two days but it seems weeks, you settle down so quickly to any new arrangement, and after you get used to it a bit it seems hard to believe you were ever anything else. Maida even says that when she visits her mother now it seems incredible she lived twenty years of her life in that house, she feels so alien somehow. Human beings are pretty adaptable, and you can grow out of a thing as quickly as you can grow into it.

We've got the dearest little house, a perfect seaside place. It belongs to some friends of the Lawrances, who built it themselves for week-ends and holidays, and who offered it to them for Easter as they were going to Tasmania. It is a duck of a place; it has just one big living-room, and all the bedrooms are down a passage leading off one end of it, and a staircase at the back leads up to the flat covered roof. My favorite spot is the huge window-seat that looks right down on the sea; it will hold two people easily, lying opposite ways, and the window runs the whole length of the seat; it is a glorious idea. If it is too boisterous to go out you can sprawl there and watch

the surf. It is a bit cold for bathing now, at least for us girls, though we went in this afternoon to try; I don't think I will again, though; I got perfectly blue and shivery, and I hate looking a fright any time. The only comfort I had was that the other girls looked bluer than I did.

We've been here two days now. The boys are not here yet, they and Mrs. Lawrance arrive to-morrow. There's just Dolly and Lottie and me. We haven't even got the maids with us, they are coming when the men do, we thought it would be better fun to do for ourselves. We are having fun too; Dolly can be charming when she likes, and at present you'd think we'd been inseparable since we were born. Breakfast this morning was a great lark, we had it somewhere after ten, when we woke up. Dolly and I got up and made it. Lottie hugged herself up in the clothes, saying she'd sooner go without than get out of her nice warm bed yet a while, so Dolly and I went out in our kimonos and made tea and toast, and got a huge glass of cream the milkman had left, and a pot of jam, and dumped the lot on a small table in Lottie's room and ate it in there. Mrs. Lawrance would have had a fit if she could have seen us.

We routed Lottie out of bed and made her put a gown on, and she sat on the edge of the bed with her hair tumbling all round her. She looked so nice, for she has clouds of hair; I told her it was a pity Dave couldn't see her at that moment and he'd propose on the spot, if he hadn't done so already, and she threw a piece of bread at me, but unfortunately

she took a piece with jam on it, and made me in a sticky mess.

But isn't it fun being mad and disreputable on occasions? I haven't enjoyed a breakfast so for years, and Dolly and I looked worse freaks than Lottie; every time we looked at each other we'd burst out laughing. Dolly was the funniest; she said she'd be the man of the party, so she took off her kimono and stood arrayed in bloomers and bare legs, finished off with red satin slippers, and with her short hair sticking out round her face she looked not unlike a gollywog.

I tied a shawl round my middle, and a scarf round my head, and made up as a dancing girl, but Lottie had a sudden inspiration and surpassed us all. She draped a sheet tightly over her nightgown, and pinned another over her head and shoulders to make a veil and train, and said she was a bride, and, do you know, she looked downright lovely; she has such a good figure and the swathed dress effect gave it full value. So I in turn draped another sheet round me for a surplice, and to the strains of the wedding-march played on the gramaphone, married her to Dolly for Dave—if poor Dave could have seen us!

But we enjoyed it hugely, and we got breakfast over about twelve and got dressed; we didn't feel like lunch then so we went for a walk on the beach. Isn't the sea air great when it's strong and sharp, and every gulp makes you feel you are taking a new lease of life? And we gossiped and sang and limericked, and told each other naughty stories, the sort

that husbands tell their wives sometimes with strict injunctions not to tell any one else—anyway we enjoyed ourselves.

But I'm wondering, yes, I'm wondering, G.G.C., if Dolly will be quite as nice to me to-morrow. Lottie happened to say something about Mr. Gale to-night, and she gave us an instant dissertation on the ancient quality of their friendship with the whole family of Gales, and how much she and Bob had liked each other when he was at college. (I don't know whether I explained that the Lawrances are really Melbourne people, and have only been in Sydney a few years.) Oh, she held forth in a most pointedly keep-off-the-grass fashion. Lottie isn't any too smart at seeing hidden jokes as a rule, but even she gave me a friendly wink.

Even her friends see the humor of Dolly.

I rather wish they weren't coming to-morrow, it will bust up the happy home for sure. Dolly won't love me any more, and Lottie will get stupid as soon as Dave puts in an appearance, she has eyes for no one but him. Now, alone with the girls she's quite jolly, and not a bit goody or prim, but when Dave's about you'd think she spent every spare second practicing "prunes and prisms."

So I'm sure she must be going to marry him. I suppose that is why she's been going to the School of Mines lately for cooking and things. She told me she is taking the course in domestic economy. She's got some sense anyway, for Dave hasn't a bean to bless himself with, and Lottie doesn't know a thing

about housekeeping. Her mother never lets her do a thing about the place, not even make her own bed. They're as rich as rich, her father is a mining man, but even then I think it's a ridiculous way to bring a girl up. Money's a kittle thing, you never know when you might lose it, or want to marry a quite poor man as Lottie does.

And anyway, dad says every woman ought to know how everything should be done even if she doesn't actually do them, or how can she tell why things are wrong, if they are, or where? You'd never make a man head of a department unless he knew the details of it to tell if his subordinates were doing it right, and as running a house is the average woman's job, she ought to know if it is running smoothly, and, if not, to detect where the fault lies.

He says he wouldn't bring us up differently if he had five times as much money as he has, and we're not exactly paupers now, you know, though I don't know exactly how much he is worth. He did tell us a few years ago, but such a lot of it is land, and the value of that fluctuates so, doesn't it? Tam is worrying him at present to buy the station next ours, it's on the market. The last man who owned it was an Englishman straight out from home, who didn't know how to manage the place. Tam reckons he could do with the extra miles for our stock now they've increased so with these last good seasons.

You'd love Tam, G.G.C. He's a real old bushy, never happier than when he's out in the scrub. He hates town now, and only comes down to see us on

rare occasions, or when he wants dad to buy something he doesn't want to.

The station Tam wants has got such a comic name, the first owner was an Irishman and real funny, dad says, and he called it "Willigobung." It doesn't look much funnier than Willibindi till you say it slowly and catch the meaning.

Dad roared when Mr. O'Rourke told him what he had christened it. He did go bung too, poor man, and shot himself.

Well, it's bedtime, and the gramaphone has just sung us a lullaby, so I'll toddle. Good-night, G.G.C. I wonder, will Dolly kiss me good-night to-morrow?

CHAPTER XXIX

A QUEER COURTSHIP

IF you ask me, I'm a prophetess. Dolly's manner to me has been growing steadily colder since the boys' arrival. I had meant to be very polite and reserved in front of her, so as not to give her a chance to say I was trying to cut her out, but I suppose it was the unceremonious way they landed on us put it all out of my head, and I was quite nice and natural.

We hadn't expected them till dinner and we were sauntering through lunch about half-past three (thank heaven we were dressed decorously!) when the motor tooted outside, and in tumbled Mrs. Lawrance and the three boys. Of course you can imagine the polite way they commented on our orderliness, having meals at such hours, and everybody talked at once, and we loudly defended ourselves; and Dave said the drive had made him hungry and helped himself to custard; and Dolly kissed the back of his head thinking it was Dr. Philip, and all round it was a joyous pandemonium.

I clean forgot about being stiff and joined in the racket, jollying everybody and giving as good as I got. And Bob would listen to me with a half-smile on his face, even when Dolly was talking to him; she could tell he had one ear elsewhere and it made

her sulky at once. He told me it seemed an age since he had seen me last. I only made a face at him and laughed, but I do hope it was true.

Dolly wouldn't let him sit anywhere near me at table; she put him by herself at the opposite side of the table, but every now and then he smiled at me. He was very nice to her and talked a lot about the drive down, but I felt all the time his inside self was talking to me and telling me how glad he was to see me again.

We built a sand castle together this morning. Don't laugh at your great-grandmother, children, but it's so comfortable to be silly at times. I suggested it, and before any one else could say a word he broke in:

"Ripping idea! Come on, Miss O'Dea, we'll see if we can build the biggest."

He calls me Miss O'Dea in front of Dolly, and I call him Mr. Gale. Somehow we have to, she makes such a hostile feeling in the air you can't be naturally friendly. We have to pretend, and every time we say each other's names our eyes laugh at each other. It seems such a joke.

But Dolly's the biggest joke, she doesn't like my being here one little bit now, and she isn't very good at hiding her feelings. Every now and again I have to chuckle. Bob must notice it too, for once or twice I've caught his eye when she has attempted to sit on me, and he has twinkled understandingly. I believe she'd like me to go home, but I shan't if for no other reason than not to give her the satisfaction of driving

me away. Besides, Mrs. Lawrance would be vexed if I did make an excuse, for she is rather fond of me, and Dr. Philip really spreads himself to make my stay agreeable.

He's so much nicer when you know him well. I love making him laugh ; he always seems unwilling to, but I drag one out every now and then, and every time I do it Mrs. Lawrance beams at me. But I do wish he was just a little less correct and proper ; I don't seem able to talk to him like I can to other men, but he doesn't seem to mind, he just sits contentedly on, at least I presume he's content since he sits on. I'd like to shake him sometimes for being so slow, especially when I see Bob and Dolly talking confidentially out of earshot. I think Bob would really rather make a four of it, but she won't let him ; once he suggested joining us, out loud, and of course Dolly had to, but she was furious about it, I could see. Dr. Philip was pleased, he's ridiculously fond of Bob. She keeps him to herself though since. I don't know how she has the face to do it. I couldn't chain a man to my side by moral suasion when I knew he'd rather be talking to another girl, could you, G.G.C. ?

It does seem aggravating, Bob wants to be with me, I know—a girl can always tell—and I want him too, and we simply can't be. We can't throw Dolly and Dr. Philip on each other's company, but I'm sure Bob's wild with her for not having another couple we could change round with, for Lottie and Dave you couldn't force apart with a chisel. I think it's bad taste in

them myself, to be so absorbed in each other in a party. It wouldn't matter even if the four of us could stay together, but a man's helpless when his hostess practically insists on keeping him to herself. All we can do is exchange looks, but it's marvelous how much better we seem to know each other even that way. Sharing a joke is as good as a secret for promoting intimacy, isn't it?

But it does seem wasteful to spend a glorious sunny afternoon listening to Dr. Philip discoursing on microbes and chemistry. At least I think that's what it's about, I only listen with one ear; most of the time I'm wondering what Bob and Dolly are saying to each other. But it doesn't matter, as long as I give him an occasional smile he goes on. He's queer in some ways; if he's making love to me, and circumstances do seem to point that way, he's got the quaintest method I ever struck. Still, I remember Gordon once said a courtship could even consist in psychological discussions and considerations on the improvement of the species; it depended on the courters.

I guess Dr. Philip's like that: he never even touches my hand if I let it lie on the sand beside his. I never met a man before who didn't put his over it. The first time I did it really was accident, it only struck me when he didn't seize it, so several times since I have done it on purpose to try him, and he never does. He must be very proper. Sometimes I feel a most wicked desire instead of shaking hands good-night, to put up my face and kiss him, just be-

cause he has never tried to kiss me. I try to picture to myself how he would take it. I've worked out six different attitudes already, and each one gives me more shivers than the one before.

But why shouldn't I, anyway? Wouldn't life be surprising, at times, if we all dared follow our impulses?

CHAPTER XXX

THE PRICE OF LOVE

My dear great-grandchildren, thank goodness I have you to let off to, or I should die of suppressed laughter; things down here are getting too screaming for words. Dolly is becoming a perfect policeman; you'd think she was engaged to Bob, the way she guards him; he has to laugh himself at times, although he's behaving beautifully, I think: he doesn't say more about her to me than he can help. We really understand each other, though, without explaining, words aren't necessary for every situation, are they? A look does for us. We neither of us say crudely that Dolly is jealous of me, but we both know it, and we both know the other knows it, and it's making for fun anyway. She's frightfully sniffy with me, but Mrs. Lawrance is a dear, so that evens it up.

The other night she, uninvited, accompanied us into the bathroom when we went to develop some photos Bob had taken in the morning; she won't leave us alone for a minute. She was like a spider—all eyes; she kept between us the whole time and helped him whenever anything had to be held or mixed, she wouldn't let me do a fragment, which was just as well, for I always drop things; in fact I broke

up the meeting, in the end, by sitting on the board over the bath and upsetting the glasses of chemicals into it. Dolly scolded me quite rudely, but Bob was so nice about it he made her madder than ever.

Served her right!

And the night after she was funnier still. Lottie told me about it. I was feeling rather out of sorts and went to bed directly after tea. Dolly didn't know this, as she had gone out with Dave. When they came back every one was in the lounge except Bob and me. I don't know where Bob was. Dolly looked round with a dark frown and asked abruptly:

"Where's Thyme?"

"She's got a headache," Lottie replied, "and said she was going to bed. Do you want her?"

"Oh, no, that's all right," Dolly answered graciously. Then it suddenly seemed to occur to her I might have climbed out of the window, headache and all, and gone to meet him, so she came across to my room to make sure I really was in bed. I could have murdered her, for I was asleep, and she made my head worse again.

Isn't she mad? Bob said she was when I told him.

"That is the most charitable interpretation," I agreed.

He looked at me sharply for a minute, but I'm sure my placid smile baffled him, for he laughed again, and said:

"You can be a little cat if you like, you know."

"All women can," I retorted, "when they're sufficiently annoyed."

A gleam of triumph lit his eyes. "Then you were annoyed?" he queried.

I pretended not to understand. "Why, yes," I said. "It's rather absurd of Dolly to take it for granted I value—certain things—as much as she seems to."

He looked so crestfallen I had to be a little nice to him.

Not that we get many opportunities of being nice to each other, but we make the most of those we do get, and, much as she'd like to, Dolly can't sit in his pocket *all* day and night; we get an occasional five minutes or half-hour. We generally contrive to meet a while before dinner. Dinner's at half-past six, and, as a rule, about six we girls go to our rooms and tidy up a bit: it takes Dolly a long while, for her hair is the straight wispy sort that gets untidy in the wind, and only looks nice when it's waved and carefully done, and with a net on it. But mine is curly, and I can twist it up in no time, and it doesn't take long to get into another frock if you want to be quick, so I generally slip out, and Bob and I have a little talk on the window-seat before the others appear, or else up on the roof.

Dolly doesn't know, for Lottie, who shares my room, has tumbled to affairs, I think, and helps me all she can. She confided to me last night that she and Dave are going to announce their engagement in a week or two. She is so much nicer than I

thought she was; love improves some girls immensely, besides there's nothing like living in the house with any one, let alone sleeping in the same room with her, for finding out whether she's all she's cracked up to be. You get sort of confidential, sitting about in your nightgowns brushing your hair, and you tell each other all sorts of things you wonder after why you did.

Talking of love, we had an argument about it last night, all of us; it was great fun, even Mrs. Lawrance joined in. We were all sitting round the fire, the nights you know are simply freezing, and there is a huge open fireplace in which we burn huge logs, and it's lovely and cozy, and little sparks hop out suddenly as if they wanted to join the party. Dolly got mad though, for when Dr. Philip took the chair next mine Bob said there wasn't room for another chair in the circle and sat himself down on the hearth-rug at my feet. She glared at me all night, even slow old Dave noticed it; he said to me to-day with a chuckle:

"I say, Thyme, Dolly never took her eyes off you last night; what have you done to her?"

Her unblinking stare made me feel so wicked that I told Bob he might lean up against my knee if his back got tired, and then, because Dolly scowled more than ever, I ran my fingers through his hair as it was so temptingly in reach, and made it all stand up in points and little horns; everybody laughed, they knew it was only fun, except her ladyship. We were sitting in the firelight practically, for the lamp at the back was very low, and then Dave wickedly stole my

hairpins, and, as I'd only twisted my hair up that night in an awful hurry, it tumbled down, and every one said how lovely it was and asked me not to put it up again, at least the men did, but I would have, of course, only Mrs. Lawrance said so sweetly :

" Leave it down, dear, if they want you to, it looks so pretty, and it's not so very long ago I can remember that was your usual way of wearing it."

" Four years ago," I said with dignity.

And everybody laughed.

Bob told me it looked like spun shadow, with the flames dancing on it. Compliments are funny things, the way some please you and some don't, aren't they? Gordon thinks women don't like them, he says they are an insult to a woman's intelligence. But I think there are compliments and compliments. Nobody likes blatant, bold lies. They are cheek when you know they couldn't possibly be true; you wonder what sort of fool you are taken for. The best are those that just dance on untruth's precipice.

For instance, if Bob had told me I had a pretty nose I should have scorned his unflattering opinion of my credulity, because it's very nearly a snub, it just misses it; if he had praised my mouth I should have been unmoved, because people always have said nice things about it, but, though my hair is glossy and thick and curly, most people don't comment on it, because I have better points, but I'm secretly rather proud of it, so it was clever of Bob to admire it.

I think people who flatter you cleverly are nearly

always nice, because it takes a fairly unselfish person to be a good flatterer; he has to find out the vulnerable point of your vanity, and that requires tact, and tact is just a sort of unselfishness, and, of course, unselfishness is about the cleverest form of selfishness there is, since you get admired for it. No one does anything without a reason, even if it's subconscious, and people are unselfish and give up something they want to get something they want more. Sometimes the thing they want more is just the glowy feeling of having been unselfish, but they must really like that better than the other thing or they wouldn't do it. We can only do what we want to do, that's plain sense. Besides it's psychology, too, I remember Gordon telling me.

Lottie told me to-day that Dolly told her she thought it perfectly disgusting for a girl to sit there, with her hair hanging about her shoulders, in front of three strange men. She's only jealous because she hasn't pretty hair herself.

And then we got on to love. They went for me because I said it could be bought. I reckon it can too. What started it was a novel every one is talking about just now, where some millionaire gets a girl to marry him, believing him poor, and who says now he has all he wants in life. He had always bought everything he desired up till then, but love was the one thing he couldn't buy. I said you could. Love can be bought, of course; like everything else of value it has its price: some people just don't understand the art of shopping. Different

men are accessible to different bribes, that's the first lesson of a diplomat, and all women are natural diplomats, or ought to be, poor dears; there's as much tact needed to manage one man as would supply a British embassy for five years.

You can buy some sorts of love with presents; lots of children love their parents because they have always been good to them and given them things. Or you buy love, using your strength or beauty as a lure, for your strength or beauty is not the real you that is loved. Of course, when I said that they protested I wasn't talking about real love, but, as I said, who's going to define love anyway? It seems to me every one, from Shakespeare up (what a heresy to say from Shakespeare *up*) has tried his hand, and the world's not much wiser. It's one of those things you've got to *have* (like measles) to understand. Love is wisdom, not knowledge. I've heard it said, "Wisdom is what we've got, knowledge is what the other fellow's got," but I think myself knowledge is common hearsay property, wisdom is the special little dose of knowledge you've tried for yourself and found all right. Really, for all life there's no motto like the one that used to hang in the store up-country when I was little, "Taste and try before you buy."

The commonest way to buy love is with love; the other person is flattered into loving you in return. After all I suppose love's like life, just a bank where you can only take out what you put in, though in some cases, if you're lucky, you get interest. Gordon

says it's a mirror where you see reflected in a vague glory your own ideas about the person instead of the person, so it all comes back to the simple point that loving any one is loving something about yourself, and self-love, so Gordon says, is the very core of our being. That's why most people find love so nice; it's delightful to be of good conceit with oneself.

But they went for me like anything when I said that and quoted a mother's unselfish devotion at me. But Gordon says that is the most selfish of all; she adores her child because it is hers, her very, very own, it's just worship by proxy of herself. Sometimes I think he's right. I never met any one that loved unselfishly; anyway, men always want to own a woman when they love her, and women are nearly as bad.

But they fairly howled me down, and when we were separating for the night Bob said to me under cover of the noise:

"Well, little cynic, what's the price of your love?"

I tilted my head sideways and looked at him under my lashes. "Perhaps it's not on the market," I suggested.

"According to your theory it must be, when the right price comes," he retorted. "Are you sure no one's got an option on it already?"

"What's it to do with you?" I said, and tried to draw my hand away, but he held it tightly and repeated his question, his red-brown eyes seemed to stare right down through me.

"*Has* any one?" he said again.

And do you know, G.G.C., I had to answer "No"; it was for all the world as if he had drawn my will away. I was mad with myself after. But, oh! G.G.C., he loves me, I'm sure of it, a little bit; but then I dare say he loves other girls too. It's funny how we always want to be the only one, isn't it?

CHAPTER XXXI

ON THE VERANDA

My dears, I haven't had a minute to write down what's been happening till now; it's all been happening so quickly. If Dolly only knew the half of it she'd have fits. Bob has gone back to Sydney, he couldn't be spared any longer from the office, he said, but the rest of us are not going back for another couple of days. The last bit of his stay was most exciting. Dolly got worse and worse, she absolutely wouldn't speak to me at the end, not if we were alone; she would in front of the others if she had to. Alone if I spoke to her she simply looked at me and made no reply. Wasn't it awful, because she is my hostess, and however wild she is with me, sheer hospitality ought to prevent her insulting a guest in her own house. But Dolly is a queer creature, she has been abominably spoiled, her family think her perfect, and she has a high temper, and between the two she doesn't seem to act by ordinary codes of decency.

I felt awful about it, but I didn't see what I could do. I thought at first I'd go straight home, but I couldn't think of a decent excuse without explaining the situation to Mrs. Lawrance, her own mother—I couldn't, could I? I'd have written home and asked them to telegraph for me, but that would have

meant endless explanations afterward, so I decided to try and put up with it. But you can guess how strained things have been with Dolly's lowering face presiding over everything. But she's an awful fool anyway; does she suppose she can win a man by getting sulky? She's done for herself, too, as far as he's concerned; he's wild with her for the way she has treated me. I didn't mean to tell him about it, but I suppose I looked upset when I found she wouldn't speak. I know I felt it, and Bob insisted there must be something wrong, though I vowed there wasn't, and he coaxed me till he got the story out of me. He was angry.

"The girl's a perfect fool," he declared with more vehemence than I knew he could use; "what does she mean by it anyway? She's got no right to resent our being friends," when I suggested that was all it was. (And I think it was really noble of me, don't you, to pretend she only disliked being ousted from her place of chief pal after the way she had behaved?) "I've never been a special friend of hers, at least not very special. I used to think her a jolly sort—but Great Scott! you poor little girl," he added so nicely, "but never mind, I'll be gone to-morrow and your troubles will be over."

But Dolly hadn't finished with us, oh, dear no. We went for a walk on the beach that afternoon, all of us, and Bob tried to get next to me lots of times, partly for mischief, but do you think Dolly would let him? She shepherded him like a kelpie cutting out the flock. I suppose it was horrid of us, but every

time we caught each other's amused smile we couldn't help it. It's such tiny things she's so absurd in, you know. I'll tell you one for example. While we were walking my shoe came untied, and of course I stooped to tie it up myself. I always do; I think it's absurd to make men get down on their knees to do it unless they want to particularly, and Bob apparently did, for he was on one knee and had it tied before I could stoop. And not a hundred yards from there Dolly gets hers untied, and pokes her foot out for him to tie it up, so of course down he has to go again. It was fairly ludicrous. I never guessed Dolly was such a fool; her temper seems to have blinded her to every standard of common sense, for even old Dave smiled.

But the thing that made us both really furious was the afternoon he went away, at least he didn't go till after dinner. Just before dinner, as usual, I slipped away out of my room and met him, and as it was a lovely evening we decided to go on the roof.

Dolly must have seen me come out of my door, but you'll never guess the rotten thing she did. Bob and I were leaning over the rail looking at the sea, it was simply beautiful, heaving lazily to and fro like a child lolling on the sand, and the last pink of the sunset shimmering across it, and we talked a lot of nonsense. But it was a funny thing, at times he seemed almost pettish, as if I had vexed him, and then he would be nicer than ever again. I forget exactly what I was saying one minute, but he said quite resentfully:

"You seem to know a jolly lot of men. I believe you know more than I do."

I took it as a joke, so I said for fun, "Ah, but perhaps they'd rather know me than you."

Bob laughed too, but rather curtly. "I should think so." Then he added in the same half-humorous, half-vexed way, "How much of your reputation is deserved, I wonder?"

"What do you mean?" I said.

"Well," he laughed, but a little horridly, "I've told you before I'd heard about you before I met you."

"What had you heard?" I temporized.

"That—well, that you had damaged more than one man's heart."

"It's kind of you not to call me a callous flirt outright," I said. I tried to speak coldly, but my voice quivered a wee bit. I did feel hurt, I never deliberately lead a man on; I do not. I think it's hateful and low, and to have Bob, of all people, insinuate it about me—I had to swallow quite hard, but he wasn't looking at me so he didn't see how damp my eyes felt.

But he didn't speak for such a long time I couldn't resist saying in the end, "Why should it interest you anyway?"

"It might," he answered deliberately; then he turned and looked me straight in the eyes, and after a second I felt so quivery I had to look at the floor, and then he took me by the shoulders, gently and yet savagely, if you can understand, and his voice was quite harsh as he said:

"Are these drooped eyelids part of the game, you lovely little siren?"

I didn't answer anything, and then he said in the softest coaxingest way in the world:

"Daytime," and drew me toward him, and suddenly, as if he had been shot, his hands dropped and he started fumbling in the pocket of his coat.

"Where did I put those cigarettes now?" he said, and as I stared at him the door cautiously drew an inch apart and Dolly's and Dave's faces peeped at us.

"Oh, there you are," said Dolly lightly. "Dave and I came up for a breath of air before dinner. Isn't it lovely here?" and they both stepped out on the roof. Then I understood his lightning change, he must have awfully quick hearing, I hadn't caught a sound, and when I understood I felt furious, absolutely. Wasn't it a rotten cad's trick to spy on us like that? I felt my eyes just scorching with wrath, and when I looked at Bob his were too. As for Dave, he looked supremely uncomfortable, only Dolly chattered blandly on. But what fools we should have looked if Bob had not heard her in time. How could she be such a cad, in her own house too? That's what surprises me at her behavior; if I wasn't her guest it would be—well, if not excusable at least less inexcusable.

Poor Dave detained me for a minute when the dinner gong sounded and blundered out an apology.

"I can't tell you how sorry I am, Thyme," he said uncomfortably. "I never knew Dolly was going to play a trick like that. I do beg your pardon."

The poor old thing was horribly upset, but I was too vexed and ruffled myself to reassure him much, though I tried to. And, to crown it all, Dolly had the impudence to say sweetly as we were coming down-stairs:

"I say, you two look awfully glum; did Dave and I interrupt anything very touching?"

I should like to smack her face.

Bob looked wrathful just a little all through dinner, and he had to go back just after. He went down to the motor-shed at the back to get his car, and while he was away they asked Dave to sing and Dolly had to play for him, she does accompany beautifully: the rest went inside to hear, but Lottie and I stayed on the veranda and then Bob came round the front and up the steps.

"I wanted to see you," he said abruptly, "I'm awfully sorry."

"Oh, it doesn't matter now," I said. Lottie like a perfect angel had unobtrusively melted away, she strolled down to the gate and admired the car, so we were alone. Dolly was still playing for Dave. He glanced round quickly, and then said:

"You're a brick not to be wild with me, I nearly put you in a rotten position, but I never dreamed——" he hesitated, I suppose he didn't like to slang an absent girl.

"Never mind," I answered, and then we said nothing for a minute, we just stood there and looked at each other. Once a bicycle shot past with its lamp like the light on a witch's forehead, and over-

head the stars hung low and seemed to be trying to whisper, "Oh, get it over! We're bored after such centuries of it," and in the paddocks at the side papa bullfrog was holding a singing class. It sounded as if the earth and branches about us were whispering, rustling, running; tiny little feet, millions of them, pattered like dry leaves round us—the earth was talking and we listened and ——

"I hate to go," he said still in the same abrupt way, "and leave you here with Pip."

"Why?" I said, staring at my fingers on the rail.

"He's in love with you and you might ——"

"Don't be so absurd," I said.

"I suppose it is absurd," he answered cuttingly. "I suppose you are far too well-balanced and calculating to let yourself descend to falling honestly in love."

I just looked at him. I felt as if he had slapped me, and in spite of myself a big tear simply pushed its way through my eye and fell flop on my hand; and then Bob did a lightning change, like a Tivoli star: he suddenly grabbed me to him so hard I couldn't breathe, and kissed me about forty million times in one, and said:

"I ought to be shot, oh! you darling."

And then of course the music stopped and Dolly appeared. I had to shake hands good-bye with him after that in front of the rest. Oh! G.G.C., isn't life absurd?

But he loves me. I know he does. Oh, I do feel so happy. I've been beaming all day, like the little

candle we used to sing about in Sunday-school. Well, I suppose my fate is settled. I wonder if I have found your great-grandpapa, my dears? Perhaps he's only flirting, after all, but I do think he meant it on the veranda; still, he hasn't asked me to marry him yet, has he? I expect I will when he does—I suppose I ought to say if he does. I wish he would write, it seems years since he went, and it's only one day. I'm dying to get home and see him again, life is frightfully exciting, there's always something new.

And there's lots of things too, big things I haven't had yet. There's marriage ahead of me, and even after motherhood there's still death. Gordon says Nature arranges her crises well, and leads up to the —what do dramatists call it?—the climax. She's a good playwright. Like playwrights she sometimes fails too, and ends up with an anti-climax. When a person gets sick to death and works all his relations and friends into a fever over his approaching demise, and suddenly recovers, from an artistic standpoint it's an awful anti-climax, at least so Gordon says, but then he's a callous wretch.

I had a post-card from him to-day to hope I'm enjoying myself. I feel quite swell-headed, it's a most unheard of attention from Gordon.

I wonder if Bob does want to marry me. Mother would be pleased.

CHAPTER XXXII

FLOWER OF THE PEA

HOME again, and everything is dull and disgusting. Bob is away in Melbourne again. He went the day we got home, and I didn't see him. He rang up, so the family said, just before his train left, to see if I had arrived, but of course I hadn't. The family seems to approve. Mother told me he was a very nice young fellow; that's because he has nearly four hundred a year. It's not wealth, but it's not too bad to start on, is it? I expect we'll have—I mean he'll have—lots more later on; his people are awfully rich, or so every one says.

It was so nice to see old Gordon again, he came round my first night home, when I was feeling melancholy about Bob, and we had a lovely yarn. Of course he got most of it out of me too, it's absurd the way I tell Gordon everything, but I don't seem able to help it, and yet he seldom asks questions, it's as if he willed me to volunteer the information he wants. But I was awfully curious to know what he thought of Bob, so after I'd told him a bit about how nice it all was, except Dolly, I said casually:

"Do you think Mr. Gale is a flirt, Gordon?"

Gordon grunted.

"Do you?" I said, feeling rather put out; "well, I don't see how you can know; you're not a girl, he couldn't flirt with you."

"Good lord," said the disgusted Gordon, "it doesn't need personal experience to tell. Individualism comes out in everything, in a man's walk, his gestures, the cut of his clothes, the boots he wears, the tobacco he smokes, and the way he eats his food. I've watched our mutual friend a bit more than you guess. He's the flirt in its highest development. He can no more help it than breathing. He flirts with girls, he flirts with his tucker—I've never seen him eat a square meal yet, he patronizes the light side of literature: he's a dab at small talk—flirts, as it were, with conversation. Of course he's a flirt. Why? Been flirting with you?"

"Do mind your own business," I said crossly.

"Right," Gordon replied, and equably went on smoking.

"I wonder if he was," I mused aloud.

"Then it was he," Gordon commented. "I wondered which of them it was."

"Why should it be either?" I demanded pettishly.

Gordon almost sniffed. "It wouldn't be you to go away for a week with two men without at least one of 'em falling in love with you, probably both. Do you"—he knocked his pipe out rather noisily—"do you happen to intend to marry him?"

"He hasn't ask me," I replied.

"That's nothing; you can make him if you want him to."

"Gordon," I said, quite exasperated, "stop being insulting."

"I'm not. Don't get on the high horse. Let me point out to you something most folks don't realize, my dear: *it's the girl who really does the courting.* You needn't try to look horrified, it won't wash with me; you know it as well as I do. The girl makes the opportunities, the man merely takes advantage of them. It rests with the girl every time whether he shall shy off or come on; it's her doing whether, when he comes, he sees her alone, or if mother will be an obstruction, and, if he's slow in coming to the point, she will hasten matters by shying off a trifle, or doing a line with some one else. Why, look here"—Gordon warmed to his subject—"only a week or so ago a chap I know pretty well got engaged. He'd been running the girl for some time, and I had been keeping my eye on the affair, for there's nothing more fascinating to watch than a courtship—to watch philosophically I mean. For some weeks she had been running another chap mighty hard, and that's what woke up my friend. He admitted it. He said to me, 'You know Bee and I have been going pretty strong, but I wouldn't have got actually engaged yet a bit if it hadn't been for So-and-so; he was making the pace too hot, so I had to or chance losing her.' And now So-and-so is on the mat and looking pretty sick on it. But girls have no conscience."

"Nonsense, Gordon," I said, though my own gave me a twinge. "We're not as cold-blooded as you make out, nor as shameless."

"My dear kid," Gordon replied with irritating calm, "I never accused you of either. A girl is most of the time quite unaware of her tactics, she does what she does instinctively, she follows nature. Both girl and man are nature's instruments acting blindly. Why should we scorn either? I couldn't speak disrespectfully of nature's work if I tried. George!"—he laughed, and his eyes twinkled behind their glasses—"haven't I been through the mill?"

I felt suddenly bad-tempered. "Have you ever been in love, Gordon?" I asked.

"Ever?" He laughed again, and I felt crosser than ever. "Scores of times. You get some eye-openers by it. I'll never forget one. I was lost in admiration at the consummate art with which she used to dispose of mother and the other chap and give me a chance to practice my wiles upon her."

"She must have been a brazen piece," I said viciously.

"She wasn't," Gordon calmly contradicted; "she was a modest and extremely nice girl."

I sat and chewed my little finger thoughtfully. Somehow it had never occurred to me before Gordon might have all sorts of secrets in his life. He suddenly seemed quite different and interesting.

"Gordon," I said coaxingly, "have you ever been really in love, novel kind of love, I mean?"

Gordon smoked on a bit without answering, then he said slowly: "I'm not sure. If the other half of me would leave me alone I might have been married a dozen times over. I suppose"—he shrugged his

shoulders—"I ought to be grateful to my other half. In any affair it always sits back with a cynical smile and points out the manœuvres to me, it's disconcerting to say the least. Sometimes I wonder whether I really do love," he went on musingly, "or if it is only that I love differently from the average man, with my eyes open instead of shut. Of thinking the girl I love anything fundamentally different from other girls, as some fellows seem to, or of living in an exalted fervor of happiness that gilds everything, I am not capable, or I never have been anyway. I think I love even at the beginning more in the tolerant shrewd way a man might love his wife after six or seven years, seeing her good and bad points, weighing for and against and reckoning the 'for' predominates. I can't divorce my heart from my head, you see, or I sometimes wonder if it is only that I have more self-control than most men and it extends even to my feelings. And yet, you know" —he smiled at me through the smoke—"they take their revenge by giving me a deuce of a time occasionally."

"Tell me the worst time," I said, getting a tiny bit closer on the sofa. He leaned back on the cushions and shut his eyes, and round the corner of the drawing-room (the big Chesterfield where we were is in a kind of recess), Marje was playing something soft to Petermac.

"I think," he said slowly, "the worst was Flower of the Pea."

"What a name," I said. "Who was she?"

"An island girl; it wasn't her real name. Her own beat me, so that's what I called her. Don't you know that little Venetian song, Thyme:

"'Flower of the pea,
We were but children and we loved each other,
What heart is thine that thou canst go from me?'"

"A native!" I said incredulously. "Gordon, you couldn't *love* a native girl."

"Couldn't I?" Gordon said dreamily with shut eyes. "It was fierce. She spoke the prettiest broken English you ever heard. I've never heard any one say my name as sweetly as she did."

"Did she call you Gordon?" I asked.

Gordon smiled retrospectively. "She tried to. But she intimated it was a barbarous syllable. I couldn't pronounce hers either, so we were even. She gave me a pet name too in the end."

"Oh, did she," I said, feeling simply savage, I don't know why. "Was she pretty?" I asked at length.

"Very, for an island girl, and—yes, even for not an island girl. She had lovely brown eyes and hair like yours, only better, and a skin just the softest golden kind of shadow effect between thick trees at midday."

"Gracious," I said when I had recovered my breath after Gordon's outburst. "Well, what happened? Tell me about her."

"Not for something," Gordon replied without moving; "never tell one woman about another."

"Good heavens," I said disdainfully, "one would think I was in love with you the way you talk."

Even that didn't move him. "Why shouldn't you be?" he returned equably. "You wouldn't be the first."

I simply gasped at his cheek and then remembered who it was talking and laughed instead.

But I would like to find out more about his Flower of the Pea. Fancy saying she had nicer hair than mine. Really it's exasperating of Gordon not to care about me that way if he can other women. Of course I don't want him to love me; it would spoil everything; but it is humiliating to think other women can make him fall in love and I can't.

CHAPTER XXXIII

LETTERS

I HAD a nice batch of letters to-day, one from Bob and from each of the kids and Max too. I thought Bob was never going to write, but he says he has been frightfully busy, as usual. I got quite worked up before it arrived. Isn't it absurd the silly way your heart waits for the postman when you're expecting word from the nicest person in the world. (Bob is adorable, you know, G.G.C. I'm convinced of that since his letter; you must say it Gordon's French way too, with the accent on the "*a*ble," and then it sounds like a big beautiful sigh of satisfaction.)

But it *is* ridiculous the way it throbs until the letters go wop on the floor, and how it goes lower and lower and heavier as you pick them up and find *the* letter isn't there, till it seems to weigh a ton. And then at last when it *is* there, you feel as if you had received a ten-pound note. My dears, have you ever felt as foolish as that? I don't think even I've been quite so bad before; if there are any prizes offered for champion fools I think your great-grandma had better apply.

But it was such a sweet letter. I'll read you a bit. It doesn't commit him to anything, you know, but I'm sure he cares. He says:

"I hope you kept your promise and took me for

that walk on the beach after I left. It was moonlight, wasn't it? I could see it all. Ah! if I could only have been with you in the flesh as well as the spirit. I sat in the office thinking about you when eight o'clock came round. I didn't do any work for a bit.

"I enjoyed it tremendously; there's no need to tell you that, is there? It's as sure as algebra. Suppose we work it out by that. Call you x and me y. Had I been there $x + y$ would have equaled —what? But I can tell you $y - x =$ very complete loneliness and regret at times. So let us hope the signs will soon change. Or else call y my regard for you, and x your regard for me—if I could only hope to make x equal y!

"No, you are quite wrong in the surmise you conveyed to me through Pip. I didn't come for the races. I am really on sober business. I haven't been once near the course. As a matter of fact I'm getting sick of races. I've been in one (the human race) ever since I was born, and I don't seem to be a favorite; in fact my betting is about 100 to 1. But I hope to get along better in the next heat."

I wonder what he means by the next heat. I asked Gordon, and he snorted and said:

"Probably the married handicap, open to all comers, no training required."

I wonder if he did mean that. Isn't it exciting, G.G.C.? I wish he'd come back.

Dolly is being horrid still. She came round yesterday to borrow a skirt pattern, or a jampot, or

something, so that she could tell me Bob had sent them seats for Oscar Asche just before he left for Melbourne. What a fool she is. Indiscretion's about the most foolish thing a girl can indulge in. Every fellow likes to enjoy the company of another girl or two besides the extra special, but he does balk when the other or two cook his hash with the E.S., and that is what Dolly does every time. Some day she'll get hurt.

She enlarged a while on what a nice boy Bob is, and how great a friend of the family, and how much they all like him, and so on.

"Why, yes," I agreed, "he told me how fond he was of you all. He thinks there's no one like Dr. Philip; we both agreed he was a brother one would be rather proud of."

This damped Miss Dolly a trifle, but she pursued bravely how nice it had been of him to send her the seats; she didn't know why he should have thought of it, as he was rushing away in a hurry too.

"Oh, you were jolly good to him down at Thirroul," I answered with a simple air of solving the riddle, "and when a boy hasn't a home of his own that's the only way he can pay back invitations."

She went quite pink with wrath, but she couldn't think of any retort suitable to the occasion. Of course it was cattish of me, G.G.C., I admit it, but I think you must admit too she deserved it. It was accumulated vengeance for Thirroul. I'd do it again; I haven't paid off my score with her yet. I suppose real forgiveness is a virtue, but Gordon says

what often passes as forgiveness is just a craven spirit, an inability to rise to the heights of revenge. Gordon says hate, like love, is on a pinnacle; like water in a bent tube, they find their level. Real forgiveness means absolute forgetfulness, and there's hardly merit in forgetfulness, is there?

I can never pick out just where Gordon goes wrong, even when I feel he must be.

The kids' letters were awfully funny too. Vane got on to the subject of Gordon again; he really is more than ridiculous. What do you think he did—offered to *help* if he could. I haven't laughed so for years; I reckon it was rich. Of course it was frightfully nice of him, and I forgot I am not to call him a kid any longer; he remonstrated last letter, and said he thought he was past that now. He evidently thinks love has aged him. He seems very satisfied the way things are going with Ada, and they like the station so far.

But I really think Ada is more fond of him than she cares to admit; she is getting a much nicer, softer look, and she doesn't criticize me nearly as brutally as she used. I hope he will stick to her if she does care, for she's the sort would take it hard to be deserted in her first affair. It would probably prove her last. But things seem all right so far, Vane still rhapsodizes about her to me, she's still the most bonza girl that ever was.

But Max's letter has upset me horribly. It really has, and Marje is so cross with me too. Of course I know I'm written down coquette, and coquettes aren't

supposed to have any feelings or remorse, but, as perhaps you know yourselves, great-grandchildren, lots have. Every type is true only to general characteristics ; it is made up of individuals. The only thing in the world I find most desirable is love. I want to be loved, I've always wanted it. It's a big sunny old world ; I've always smiled at it, and it's smiled back gaily enough at me. I love many people ; that they should be chiefly men is just because men seem to like me better than girls : and I feel a disposition to love any one who loves me—for sheer gratitude if you like. Wasn't it Byron who said the heart must leap kindly back to kindness ?

But on her honor, G.G.C., your great-grandma has never deliberately led a man on to break his heart. I like them to like me in moderation ; extremes I simply detest. But, oh dear ! life is very complicated for a girl who wants to have fun and yet be square. I never thought Max would go on liking me long after he went away. It is a nuisance ; it worries me at times dreadfully. His letters are getting worse in spots. I won't let them get sentimental, but he makes them confidential, which is worse. He tells me all about his money affairs and his work, and wishes he could get married at once. So do I, with all my heart, as long as it wasn't to me.

And now he's thrown up his job, because I said once, in fun, that a girl was a fool to marry a commercial traveler, as he was never at home. Oh, dear, Marje was so angry with me—as if I'd dreamed he'd take it like that. I always hand on his letters

to her when I've read them, you know ; she always liked Max and she likes to hear about him. If he comes back to Sydney I'll see if I can't graft a new love on him before he has quite had time to realize affairs.

But aren't you sorry for me a little, G.G.C.? Life is so worrying. I don't know what to do. I think I'll ask Gordon, only it makes it awkward being his brother.

I wish I could get another letter from Bob ; it seems a hundred years since I got this morning's. And, oh, I must tell you, I did give Mr. Wymondham a lovely snub yesterday. In front of a whole roomful of people too. There were a lot round at our place, and three or four of the men were teasing me, with Gordon for ringleader, and somehow among the chaff Mr. Wymondham happened to say :

" Ah, but she doesn't love *me* at all." And like a gun flash, I said, with the sweetest smile in the world :

" Have you only *just* found that out ? "

I can't help snubbing that man. The others roared with delight, but Gordon told me afterward I'd better be careful, or I shall get a reputation for wit, and it's worse for a woman to be witty than immoral. Men know how to deal with the one but not with the other. Men don't as a rule like to have to try to understand a woman ; I expect as a rule they think we're not worth the effort.

I think I'll go round to Maida's, she is sure to soothe me ; we do understand each other and we never scold. I shall feel better when I've seen her and cuddled Peterjohn, the pet. I bought some per-

fectly sweet embroidery to-day when I was in town to make him a frock.

You know what really makes me feel a bit scary is, suppose Bob heard about Max? I don't see how he could, but stranger things have happened. He would never understand, men don't, and he thinks me a flirt. I believe he's afraid I am only making fun of him, and that is why he didn't ask me to marry him at Thirroul. There's no one suspects people of flirting like another flirt.

Anyway I'll ask Maida what she thinks.

Oh! I forgot, I can't. I promised to go into Ida's. There's something wrong there, I'm positive. I found her crying yesterday and she wouldn't tell me what it was. It must have been something pretty bad, for she doesn't cry, and when I worried her to let me sympathize she only said it was something nasty that was threatening her. She wouldn't say anything further, only when I kissed her goodbye she added:

"Perhaps this is the last time you'll ever kiss me."

"Good gracious, Ida," I said, "what is the matter?" But she wouldn't tell me even then.

It's rather horrid of me to think it, but I can't help wondering whether her husband has been making a fuss about Lance. I don't blame him if he has; Lance really does go frightfully strong with her; but I didn't think she cared enough about him to be upset if he's being sent away. I rather hope he is. I don't think he's good for her. Though perhaps he isn't to blame. I suppose, if Gordon's estimate of her

is right, it would be rather hard for a man to live in the same house with her and not love her a bit. Still, when it's his brother's wife he ought to take a grip on himself, and I hope Mr. Lester has wakened up at last and is getting rid of him.

Poor Ida, it's rotten for her. I suppose she can't help it if the Lord made her that way. We got on to the subject yesterday, and she said to me, when I envied the way men go mad over her :

" Don't, Daytime ; sometimes I hate myself for it. It isn't love I wake in them ; it's just naked desire. Of course all love has desire in it, but the best kind has other things as well, only—I never get the other things. There's been only one man in my life who seemed to find more than that in me. Perhaps if I'd met him first I'd have been different. He used to make me feel almost churchy at times, as if I wanted to go out and have a mental and moral whitewash, but I dare say even he wouldn't have liked me if I had." A wry little smile twisted her face. " I wonder, Thyme." She sat a minute with her chin in her hands considering and gave a tiny shrug. " No, I'm afraid goodness is not my line. I came to the conclusion years ago that it's my bad points attract people. Kind of reflection, isn't it? But whether the reflection's on me or on the other people I've never satisfactorily decided."

There, I must stop now and run in for a few minutes to cheer her up. And, oh! I do wish I could get another letter from Bob to-morrow, but of course he wouldn't be such a goose.

CHAPTER XXXIV

BAD NEWS

ISN'T it lovely to lie in bed of a morning when you know you ought to be up, especially when you sleep outside, as Ada and I do. My bedroom, and the big one the triplets all share, open on to a kind of small veranda on the side garden, and that's where Ada and I sleep all the year round. You get so used to it you hate being inside even if it pours. It is a fairly sheltered spot, and we put big waterproof sheets over our beds in the wet weather, and I think it's delicious to feel the faint spatter of rain on your cheeks while the rest of you is all tucked up nice and warm under the blankets.

It was late when I woke up this morning. I looked down at Ada's bed but it was empty, she was dressing. I could hear her pulling drawers open and dropping things, but I couldn't move. I felt too deliciously lazy. The sun was lazy, like me, he was only beginning to reflect pink streaks in the west, that slowly changed to flame color and licked up among the mackerel-grey clouds like fire catching hold of deal sticks. I love to watch the sparrows; there were hundreds of them, truly, hopping about a big banksia that grows up the posts, and I saw a starling or two, nasty big thieves, creeping

slyly along the ground to the orchard at the back. And a dear willie-wagtail had the impudence to come and perch for a second on the end of my bed, to show off his clean waistcoat and prove to me how beautifully he can manage his unwieldy-looking tail.

I asked him why he wore evening clothes in the morning, and I suppose my question offended him, for he tossed his head and flew away. But I wasn't allowed to enjoy my laziness for long. I never am. Ada's voice sailed to me out of the depths of the room :

"Thyme, get up, you lazy dog. Alice says Biddy wants to know where you've put the fish, she can't find it." Alice is our housemaid.

"I haven't touched it," I retorted drowsily.

"You have," Ada replied. "I saw you with it last night, don't you remember, you fried yourself some because you were too late for dinner? Hurry up, Thyme, Biddy's waiting for it."

"I don't know where it —— Oh, yes, I remember, it's in the cellar," I replied, now wide awake. "Oh ! and Alice," I called in a thin shriek after her, "tell Biddy to light the range, I want to make cake this morning."

I always like a wood-fire if I have much cake to do, it seems to me to taste better than gas stuff. Of course, as soon as I announced my intention of being cook, Ada suggested I should mix her up a cinnamon cake for her lunch next day, and Betty, in a tone of touching politeness, requested an orange one to take to school. It's so funny that is the only

hold I have over Betty ; she adores cake, especially home-made, and if she offends me very seriously I won't make any of the kinds she likes. I suppose I ought to be thankful I have any way of appealing to her at all, even if it is through her stomach.

But I had to tell them to-day that I didn't know whether I'd have time to make their favorites, for I had a frightful lot of baking in view. Mother had about forty women coming to afternoon tea, some kind of political shivoo. Still, I'd rather have my part of the work than Marjoram's ; she has to help mother talk to them. You know as long as I have plenty of time I quite like cooking. I don't believe I spoke the truth to Gordon, I believe even if I was quite rich I should still like to do it. And sewing too—it's such fun doing things and feeling, when you look at a finished article, that it's all your very own work, and nobody else can share the credit. It's nice to wear a pretty dress some one else has made for you, but to wear one you've made for yourself is quite a different feeling altogether.

Bob will be back in a couple of days now. I had a note from him this afternoon ; it is absurd the thrilly feeling his handwriting on the envelope gives me. And I had a joint letter from the boys by the same post ; they still are enthusiastic about farming, and Micky sends a few impertinent messages about Gordon. The people they have gone to are distant relations of the Hastes, and according to both, one of the daughters is amazingly pretty. Vane says Micky is deeply smitten. The Melbourne girl and

Fay are both cut out, but if I know Micky, it won't last long. He himself is still blind to the charms of any girl but Ada—so he says.

I think I hear Gordon's voice in the passage. He is calling for me and we are going round to Maida's to-night, she rang me up and said she wanted to see me. She has some very bad news for me, so she says, she said she couldn't even give me a hint of it on the 'phone; I wonder whatever it can be. Gracious, it never occurred to me, could it be anything about Bob? Oh! good-bye, G.G.C., I must get round and find out what it is, and Gordon is calling me; good-bye.

CHAPTER XXXV

ADVICE ON MARRIAGE

GREAT-GRANDCHILDREN, my heart is broken! What do you think Maida's bad news was? Oh, I *hate* Bob Gale, he'll never be your great-grandpa now; he's a beast, a beast. I never want to see or speak to him again. And Ida too on top of it. Oh! is the whole world dirty? It's hateful, horrible; it makes me feel soiled all over. I can't realize it; you read about such things in the papers, but it's ever so much dreadfuller when it's people you know.

Oh! I can't cry any more, I just feel hot and angry. I feel bewildered too, it seems it can't be true, but I know it is. Oh! how can people do such things? No wonder Ida said I'd never kiss her again, and yet I don't know, I suppose she has an excuse. She said herself she can't live without love, and her husband didn't give her any. I suppose I oughtn't to blame her too hard. Though every one else does. Mother has forbidden me to go near her again.

They say her husband's already started proceedings. I suppose that's what was upsetting Ida when I was in last; she must have known, and it's all round Sydney now. Poor Ida! I wish I could go and see her, but I daren't while mother's on the

rampage like this. Oh! mother is wild, she keeps going off at me for being friendly with her, and says I may be called as a witness if the case gets into the courts, and all my life people will say, "Oh, the Miss O'Dea that was mixed up in the Lester divorce case, isn't it?" because no one ever stops to explain *how* you were mixed up in things like that, the mere fact condemns you from the outset. It would be ghastly, wouldn't it? I should die of horror. Surely I can't be, but the law seems to drag in all kinds of innocent people, and I have seen a lot of her and Lance together, and I might have to tell about that. I suppose it is Lance at the bottom of it. I'm scared to go in and see her; besides, perhaps she'd resent it and think me just curious, and I daren't defy mother either. I wish I wasn't so afraid of her, but we all are.

Oh! what horrible, sordid things divorces are. Perhaps she won't defend the case; somehow I think she'd be too proud. They say her husband took a detective in to surprise her, spied on her from the roof or something. He's quite capable of it. There's not much romance about wronged husbands and unfaithful wives when it's conducted like that, is there? It's the sordidness of it that's so revolting, and oh! Bob is even worse. What do you think he's been doing since he got back from Melbourne? I can hardly bear to tell even you, G.G.C., it makes me feel ashamed to write it, but—well, he's been staying with that Anderson woman at Ashfield, and he told me he didn't know who she was. Liar! All

men are liars. Perhaps he's been there with her half the time instead of Melbourne, how can any of us tell? He and his precious business indeed! And to go straight to her from me, after kissing me at Thirroul. I won't marry him, I won't now, and yet—oh! I know it's despicable of me, but I want to more than ever; what do you think of that, G.G.C.? Or have you ever felt the same?

But I know now I love him. If I didn't I wouldn't be so furious and hurt. I wonder if Bob would ever dream how much it hurts me and if he'd care if he did. I suppose he'd think me unreasonable. Most men think women are.

I don't know who to ask advice from either. It's such an awkward subject, isn't it? Even Maida is no good here, for she hasn't an atom of feeling for him. I suppose she's hard because she's been lucky enough to strike a good husband. And Gordon—well, I don't mind discussing such a thing theoretically with him, but when it comes to telling him about a man I know—somehow it doesn't seem quite fair to Bob either. All the same, I shouldn't be surprised if Gordon knows; it's wonderful how things like that get round.

I felt so miserable last night I told mother about it. She is awfully clever, you see, and knows heaps about men, and she is so much older than I—I didn't like doing it, but going to bed I suddenly felt I couldn't bear it any longer by myself. I can't tell Marje, because she would be shocked, and the triplets are out of the question of course. I stood

for a long while with my hand on the knob of mother's door, and then I summoned resolution enough to knock; when I'd done that I felt like running away, but of course I had to go in.

But when I got in I pretended I only wanted to ask her how many were coming to lunch next day. She was sitting reading in a dressing-gown, and the light winked and blinked among the silver on her table, and made cozy shadows in the blue curtains, and reflected all the glitter and shade in the mirrors.

She went on reading, and after I had asked her, I fidgeted round; I couldn't make up my mind either to ask her, or to go out, and at last she put her book down and looked at me with her big grey eyes—they are such beautiful eyes, but as hard as nails; they only soften when she looks at Betty, who has her own dark curls and little even teeth; the rest of us are all fair.

"I wish you wouldn't fidget so, Thyme," she said in her even voice. "Do you want anything else? I can't keep my attention on my book."

I hung on to my courage with both hands and feet. "I want your advice," I said.

"You often do," she replied calmly; "but I notice you seldom take it."

I was still silent.

"Well?" she said.

And then I blurted the story out, what Maida had told me. You see Tom saw them together there. Mother got up while I was talking and played with the mirror on her table.

"Well?" she said again when I had finished.

"Would you marry him?" I asked bluntly.

And then, for the first time for years and years, mother took me in her arms and held me close to her, and it seemed as if she'd taken the corsets off her heart too. Sometimes I wonder if she ever loved any one: one of my aunts once told me that mother was quite different as a girl, she liked everybody, and was gay and nonsensical like me, and she was going to marry a quite poor man but he jilted her. Then she married dad. Sometimes I wonder whether she would love us all like she does Betty if the other man was our father.

"Poor child," she said gently, and kissed me. "The problem has come to you that comes to many a woman. It is a terrible shock, dear, I know, but even your mother cannot help you. The one question is, do you love him enough to forgive and to try to forget? Is your affection so great that you can marry him in spite of what you know? Only your heart can answer that."

"If only all men were like Gordon," I said.

"Why not marry Gordon, then?" mother asked, and smiled inscrutably.

"Gordon!" I echoed, amazed at the attack from mother on top of the rest. "He wouldn't have me."

"Ah!" said mother. "Please close the door after you, Thyme, when you go out."

That was a polite dismissal.

So I'm not much better off, am I? I haven't seen Bob yet. He wanted to come round to-night, but I

pleaded a bad cold as an excuse when he rang up. I really have an awful one; the sort that makes your eyes teary and your nose run, and you look a general fright. He's a hypocrite as well as a liar. He pretended to be frightfully disappointed he couldn't see me, and said he'd just been counting the days till he got back. Yes, counting them with the Anderson woman, no doubt.

I wish I could tell him what I think of him, but it wouldn't be proper, would it? And cowardly and weak as it sounds, I couldn't feel so cross when he was speaking to me, it was so lovely to hear his voice again. I had to keep reminding myself he'd just come from her not to let myself answer him too nicely.

But I'm sure he felt something's the matter, he sounded quite hurt as he rang off.

And yet I could find excuses for Ida. I suppose if I don't blame her I shouldn't him; perhaps I don't understand that sort of thing yet, as she says. But I think now I've got a sneaking sympathy for Mr. Lester; it's all very fine to be broad-minded in theory, but when it's some one belonging to you—and I never knew before how I loved him.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THYME IS JEALOUS

No; I can't marry Bob now, I just can't. Of course, G.G.C., you may think I'm a bit premature turning a man down before he asks me; but he means to, I know, or rather he did mean to; I'm not sure he will now after the way I treated him. You see when he kissed me at Thirroul it was really a proposal, we both knew it. I'm not an ignorant débutante, a girl like me learns when a man kisses her for fun and when he does it because he loves her and wants to marry her. He only didn't ask me pointblank there because for one thing he didn't have time, and another he was afraid I wouldn't value him if I got him too easily. He knows a lot about women. But he considers we're demi-semi-engaged, and so do other people.

Mother wants me to have him, you know, although she's far too clever to say so, and even the triplets take it for granted. I got quite wild with them to-day. I caught Fay and Betty discussing how nice it would be to come and stay with Bob and me sometimes, when we were married, and perhaps his people in Melbourne would come in handy too. I was angry. I turned on them and gave them a bit of my annoyance red-hot. That cheeky little Betty simply turned on her heel and said:

"Of course, if you're going to be a fool, there's nothing more to be said, but I only wish I had half your chances. You'd see. It's all very well to stick on airs, Thyme," the brat went on—she's fourteen, mind you—"just because you're pretty; but it won't last forever, and you'll look nice on the shelf with Ada and Fay and me coming on."

You know, the deadly common sense in her words paralyzed me. It's so true.

"And," she added, as a parting shot, "when you're picking him you might remember there are enough of us to look after as it is, without tacking on poor relations."

Oh! she is like mother.

He would be a most advantageous marriage, of course—I'm not fool enough to blink that—but the question is, could I stand it? He's broken my heart, but it's not this time so much; he'd do it again and again when we're married and he'd got used to me, if he can insult me like that when he still thinks he loves me. Don't you agree with me, children?

And I was simply horrid to him at the party. We all went to Hyles's last night; they had a hunting party. Now don't conjure up a vision of bugles and beagles and busters. This was a motto hunt. You divide yourselves into equations on the assumption that 2 = happiness, and proceed up the garden by various paths to collect off the bushes such mottoes as "Make love while the moon shines" and "Where there's a Will there's a Wilhelmina."

I went hunting with Gordon. Of course it was

beastly of me, I know, but I couldn't go out in the dark with Bob; he might have kissed me again, and I couldn't have borne it fresh from that Anderson woman. I asked Gordon to be my partner going and stick to me all evening. He looked a bit surprised, but he answered promptly:

"Smile at me, and if you used Seccotine you couldn't do the job more neatly."

Isn't he a dear not to ask questions? But just because he didn't I felt I had to explain a bit.

"I—I don't want to go with Mr. Gale," I said. "Don't you give me up even if—if he asks me, Gordon."

"All right," Gordon said resignedly. "But why choose me of all men for the ignominious position of catspaw? Besides, as an unprejudiced observer, I should say you had the whole game in your hands without finessing."

I felt myself get red in the dark.

"It isn't that at all, Gordon. I'm not trying to bring him up to the scratch at all, honest. I—I—oh dear——" and before I knew what I was doing I had told him all about it. He listened without comment. He didn't say anything except, "I see. Poor kid."

And he gave my arm a bit of a squeeze, and then we were inside, and there was the chatter and laughter and pretty faces and glimpses of shoulders and the nice cool background of quietly dressed men.

Bob saw me the minute I entered the room, and smiled across at me—that confidential quick kind of

smile we keep for our dearest people among strangers, and as soon as he could decently break away he came to me. One can't say much in a crowd, so I don't think he noticed anything wrong till they began to pair off. I couldn't help being almost as nice as usual either. Why has he got such a thawing smile? It didn't seem believable about Ashfield while he was there talking, and yet it was at the back of my mind all the time, and every minute he was beside me I somehow felt meaner and meaner, as if I were in the wrong, not he. And when the others began to disperse, and he said in a quiet take-it-for-granted-no-other-arrangement-possible way, "Shall we go now?" I wished I could get under the carpet. If Gordon hadn't been there I should have got up and gone with him, I know I should, but I was both vexed and relieved to hear him say coolly:

"Sorry, Gale, but Thyme's my partner."

I felt hot all over and then cold, and I wouldn't meet Bob's eyes, though I could feel their amazement and wrath through my lids, but after a second's pause he just bowed and said:

"I'm sorry."

I watched him go and ask Dolly to be his partner, and I could have murdered Gordon, but of course it was my own fault. I suppose I minded so much because it was Dolly. I can't care about him still, can I?

But Gordon didn't look comfortable either, and when we were fairly outside he said to me:

"Look here, Thyme, are you really through with

that fellow or not? For if you're not, I think you're playing it a bit low down on him to-night. I tell you I didn't like cutting in in that way. I don't know how far you've gone with him and I'm not asking, but it was plain enough he thinks you ought to be his if you're not."

I felt miserable myself, but I couldn't have Gordon slanging me that way, so I tried to be dignified.

"Have you forgotten what I told you just now?" I demanded.

Gordon kicked a stone thoughtfully. "No," he said; "but—well, Thyme, you know there's just a chance, isn't there, it may be a mistake. He's only been seen with her; he might have half a hundred reasons for seeing her besides the one you think, there may be nothing in it. Why, I might be seen speaking to her myself, but you wouldn't go jumping to conclusions, would you?"

"You don't know her," I said.

"I do," Gordon retorted coolly, "and, what's more, she's an interesting woman to talk to. Good heavens! don't put your nose up like that, you confounded little hypocrite. Do you think the woman's a wild beast because she doesn't choose to live up to your standards? How do you know what her upbringing or her circumstances were: do you think her life's all pleasure? Do you think any human being defies the social laws for the fun of it? Not they. They have to pay too heavily. Lulu Anderson's no coward, and in theory she doesn't give a damn for the whole incompetent, sheltered, sneering

herd of you, but she told me that sometimes even she feels other women's glances sear her like whip-lashes. You're a set of calculating hypocrites," he went on scornfully. "What's the difference between you and Lulu where Bob's concerned? Because he's rich he can have his will of you both; the only advantage to you is you're so sheltered in your position that he has to put marriage in your bribe; it saves your face before the world if not your self-respect. But you're both of you only selling yourselves for money."

"I'm not," I denied half-crying. "I love him, so there!"

"Rats!" said Gordon. "If you loved him, you wouldn't let a thing like that stand between you. You'd win him away from her."

"You don't understand," I said, crying outright by now, "men never do. It's not him I hate, it's her. She's spoiling him for me. When you love a man you love everything about him, good or bad, noble or base, and you want to give him everything he wants, and you want him to want everything, and—and you don't want other women to—to—oh, don't you see, Gordon, it's humiliating, but I'm—I'm jealous."

And I cried like anything, and of course, just as luck would have it, Bob came by and saw Gordon trying to soothe me. He'll never forgive me now even if I could forgive him, for Gordon had both arms round me. He thinks I've only been flirting with him. Not that he avoided me; he came and talked to me at supper, but only in a polite way—

nicely polite, you know—no one but me could have seen the difference ; perhaps I even didn't see it, but I felt it, and at the end he said :

"Shall I take you home or are you going with Haste?" And as I hesitated he added, "I suspect you'd rather he did. He lives next door, doesn't he, so I'll say good-night."

And he never asked when he'd see me again, or anything ! I'm so miserable. I can't help it, I love him whether he's bad or not.

Oh, Bob, I am so sorry. But I don't suppose I'll ever get the chance to tell you so, and perhaps I wouldn't if I did.

Well, it's no use sitting here crying. I'd better go to bed. But oh, Bob, you can't be unhappier than I am. I do love you, I do.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE BATTLEGROUND OF LIFE

IT'S such a beastly day, and my cold's still rather miserable, and Bob hasn't been near me. I did think he would come last night, but he never even rang up. He must be angrier than I thought. I waited and waited, and inch by inch and minute by minute my heart went down to my boots.

At first I was very defiant. If he'd come at half-past seven I was prepared to be cold and uncompromising; at eight o'clock I was dignified and intolerant of questions as to my right to behave as I pleased; at half-past eight I would have been flighty and teasing; at nine I would have forgiven him at the first loving words; at ten I went to bed and cried myself to sleep.

But of course I laugh in front of the family. I'd die sooner than let them guess. Besides, I laugh even to myself—habit's more of a support than religion in a crisis, I think. And it's funny how you try to live up to what people expect of you. People expect gaiety, you know, from a girl Nature gave dimples and kiss-curls. You'd as soon expect a snail to go aeroplaning as me to take a dip into tragedy. I remember once, ages ago, I was told that I couldn't possibly ever bore any one, I was so vivacious. I had

no more idea before that I was vivacious than I was aware I ate my dinner properly, but from that day I felt I had a reputation to live up to—it's queer.

And Marje is so cross—I mean about Max. Why can't he leave me alone? I don't want his letters. Oh, I'm in a mess all round, and as Maida's away for a week's holiday, I can't even go and cry it out on Peterjohn's pinafore. It's Max's last letter, you see. I don't know what's the matter with him; he's never dared to write things like that before.

I *won't* be browbeaten or assumed off into marrying any one I don't want. Oh, I know I'm mean and unjust, but no one has any right to speak to me like Marjoram did, and it's his fault she got wild. Marje swears if I don't be honest with him she'll write herself and tell him about Bob and Gordon. She's given me a week to do it in. I simply can't, G.G.C. What shall I do? If I only *was* an unfeeling flirt I'd do it like a shot, but I can't bear to hurt any one, and that's why I get into such scrapes.

If I could only not mind wounding people's feelings. It seems so queer. I try to be nice to every one, and I do love those around me to be peaceful and happy, and yet I always seem to be getting into hot water. Marjoram is as nasty to me as she can be, and she is my pet sister. I wouldn't have shown her this letter, but I always let her read them, so when I left the blessed thing lying on my dressing-table, she picked it up. It serves me right for leaving it about. She's done nothing ever since but give me bits of her mind, and for me to tell her that she'll

be a gibbering idiot if she doesn't soon put a limit to her generosity only seems to lend her fresh strength. Now I ask you, G.G.C., was it my fault? I've never done anything to give him the right to send me a paragraph like this.

It's beastly cheek. Just you listen:

"I wish you knew what a cold haven't-had-any-dinner-for-a-week feeling settles at the pit of my stomach when there's no Sydney postmark for me. I almost believe you'd write a bit oftener. Perhaps I'm gloriously selfish to ask it, but man is a selfish animal, the which is generally treated as an excuse and not a mere fact. But when they do come they are treasured, I can tell you, and carried in my pocket and read and folded up and reread till, from their sorry appearance, no one who didn't know what a little gold mine of preciousness they were or what a soft brown hand penned them would pick them out of the gutter with a pair of tongs.

"Still, I suppose there are a good many other fellows sharing what time they can between them (do you see the awful pun?), and I mustn't be too greedy, for I wouldn't for the world have you think I grudge you all the fun you can get. I believe a blessed little angel put it into your head to make me" (listen to that—I made him!) "give up traveling. I've tumbled into a lovely soft billet and am getting a screw of £250, but I don't suppose that's quite enough to marry on, do you think?"

And that's what I get for trying to be nice to him for his mother's sake. It upset me so I even ex-

plained it hypothetically to dad—supposing things, you know—but he wouldn't be serious, only patted my head and said I'd get out of it best without my parent's interference; women, if anything, were a little too clever at getting out of ticklish situations.

I feel a beast, but you know Max has never said anything quite so pointblank before, and, anyway, he's got no business to take it calmly for granted I'm going to marry him just because I've been a little nice. Men are so jolly conceited. Besides, he's been away such a long time—over a year. How can he expect me to know whether I like him or not? It's perfectly unreasonable.

Gordon puts things beautifully. He said last night that the world feels sometimes like a big battleground at twilight, where no man can see the face of friend or enemy, and fights wildly, blindly striking half the time at shadows, fatiguing himself for no good, till the mist grows thicker and thicker and clings chokingly about him, while he hears—it seems thousands of miles away—the rollicking drum, where a little sunshine has rifted through on some lucky battlers round the standard.

That's just how I feel, and I'm sure I don't know what to do, and I don't suppose Bob will ever come back to me now, and I don't suppose I ought to want him to, but I do so dreadfully. And Ida and her husband are still estranged. He may not be going to divorce her, though, after all; she doesn't think he'll dare try. She says he's frightened at the things that might come out about himself, and as she said

it her little teeth met in a snap that somehow made me shiver. She looked so—so—I can't find the word—almost brutal; she is too delicate and small to look it exactly, but she did all the same. She is furious with him for the gossip that has got round. We haven't talked much about it, but I slipped in to see her this morning. I felt such a beast, stopping away as if I were too proud to talk to her now she is threatened with disgrace. I'm not a bit. I suppose we all do foolish things when we're hungry for love. I know what that feeling is now.

Mother wasn't up, so I slipped in through the side gate and was back before breakfast. I'm frightfully glad I risked it, for she was so glad to see me; she said I was a brick. But I felt awfully shy of talking about it—I didn't want to seem inquisitive—and perhaps my being shy made her too. At any rate, she didn't say much. She thinks he only means to hold it over her as a threat to make her ask her relations for some more money. Ugh! that makes it more sordid than ever, doesn't it? It seems she's got very rich relations, but she says she just won't ask them. She never got on with her stepsisters or stepmother, or even with her own father, very well, and she ran away and married Mr. Lester against his wishes; and though once or twice he has helped them even since that, she has hated the humiliation of it, and she says she won't ask for another penny, not even if Mr. Lester carries out his threat. She'll let him divorce her first. It's rather fine of her, isn't it? I don't think I could be as steadfast as all that;

I think I'd do anything sooner than be dragged through the courts, but Ida just sets her teeth and says he'd just better try.

I told her about Bob, too. I didn't mean to, but it came out somehow as we were talking. I suppose I was so miserable I couldn't keep it to myself any longer, and she said she didn't believe it and was sure I was making myself unhappy for a mistake. She said I ought to give him a chance to clear himself before condemning him. Oh, I wish I could, but how could I accuse him of a thing like that? I couldn't. I should die of shame. But talking with her has upset me dreadfully. Just suppose Maida has made a mistake. It would be too glorious to be true. Bob! Bob! suppose I can go on loving you—only you'll never know now.

It's strange that Ida, of all people, should be so sure he's straight, isn't it? How can she tell, especially as she doesn't know him, but I expect she only said it to comfort me.

Oh, isn't life hateful, so pretty on top and all the crawly black things just underneath! And now I must do my hair and put on a smile and go down to help entertain. There are people coming for dinner. And all I want to do is cry. A fat lot of good that does any one! I'm going to change my frock this minute; still, I think I'd better bathe my eyes first.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

A LETTER FROM BOB

I FEEL absurdly happy again, and even the weather's decided to sympathize and has turned sunny, and my cold is getting better. But Bob's coming up to-night.

> "Oh, frabjous day, calloo callay!
> He chortled in his joy."

Yes, I feel exactly like that. Oh! I never knew how much I cared till I thought he had given me up for good. I really had come to the conclusion this morning that he was going to give me up without a word.

After breakfast I took some sewing out on the veranda, but everything looked gloomy. Even Fay, while she was making the beds, would whistle "Days and Moments," and I'd just made up my mind I didn't care for forty Lulu Andersons if Bob would only come back to me, and that I'd write and ask him to come up, or telephone and pretend nothing had happened and that I'd been merely suffering from a fit of cantankerousness. And just as I'd made up my mind to eat humble pie and felt tons better for it, a shrewd-looking youngster swung in at the gate.

He was going up to the front door, but when he saw me in the corner he turned round to me and

pulled at his cap, with the usual reluctance of the small office-boy, who seems to consider it beneath his dignity to show deference to any one.

"I got a letter here for Miss Thyme O'Dea," he announced. "Are you her?"

"Yes, I am," I replied.

"Hang on then," he said, and after carefully fishing in his pocket produced a note. "Blessing I ain't lost it," he remarked conversationally as he handed it across. "The boss'd sack me in a jiffy, I guess. Wouldn't blame him neither." The cheeky young imp's eye took me in appreciatively. I had to laugh at his expression, it was so frankly flattering.

"But why did Mr. Gale send it by you," I asked, likewise conversationally, as I tore it open, "instead of posting it?"

"'Ow should I know?" he retorted. "'E pays me to take 'is letters where they're ticketed to. 'E would fetch me one acrost the ear for me lip if I started astin' 'im why 'e makes a pillar-box of me, wouldn't 'e just? P'raps the letter'll tell yer, miss," he suggested. "I'll jest wait round the corner to see if there's any answer," and away he strolled. You wouldn't have expected such delicacy from a brat like that, would you?

As soon as he had moved away I read the letter, and, do you know, my hands shook so as I unfolded it I could hardly read at first. But sending it by messenger, and after our three days' estrangement, it was enough to make me nervous.

The letter started without any salutation:

"I have just found out the reason of your treatment of me. It appears you are not merely the heartless coquette I was forced to conclude from your conduct. I will come round to-night if it suits you and if you will be *quite alone*. I have a good deal to talk over. BOB."

The "quite alone" was scored underneath very heavily. I looked round at the flower beds, and they all seemed to have gone scarlet and pink again instead of grey gloomy purple, and I suppose I was beaming like a romantic idiot, for when I called the boy he beamed too like my reflection.

"Answer, miss?" he suggested.

"Oh, yes, of course," I said, "in one moment. Is—— How is Mr. Gale? Is he——" I hesitated. I couldn't resist the temptation to question him, I did want so dreadfully to know if Bob had been feeling miserable too. But there was no need to go on, the kid saw through me like a shot, and a sympathetic grin illumined his face.

"'Is temper's been 'ell for the last three days," he said with a funny mixture of freedom and respect. "S'pose it was you, miss. The bets was even in the orfis if it was a girl or if 'e'd just been on the loose. I bet a girl."

"Did you?" I said, smothering a laugh, and I went inside to write:

"I shall be alone.—THYME."

And I gave it to the small Mercury to take back.

He looked so knowing when he took it that I positively blushed.

But I am so glad Bob has been short-tempered too. It shows he does care, doesn't it, G.G.C.? Yes, I know I've climbed down. I suppose it's weak, but I don't seem to care what he's done as long as he loves me. I can forgive him even that. Perhaps it isn't true, either, though he doesn't deny it in his letter, does he? He talks as if I were in the wrong, and he had all the forgiving to do; isn't it adorable cheek on his part? I love him more than ever.

I promptly went inside and finished up a chiffon blouse. I have had it hanging round for days half-done, chiffon is such ticklish stuff to handle I somehow can only work at it when I feel happy. Perhaps I'll wear it to-night with my cream cloth skirt. I must look nice. I've picked two beautiful pink rosebuds to wear and put them in water in my room. Ada saw them when she came in and laughed.

"Is Mr. Gale coming?" she said. "I thought as much," as I nodded. "Going to bring the ring to-night, Thyme?"

"Don't be an idiot," I said. "How should I know?"

"Who should know better?" Ada retorted. "You might do worse."

"Do shut up," I said irritably. It's so horrid the way the family all seem to think I favor Bob because of his prospects. I didn't mind it at first, because perhaps I thought of them myself; but now it's just that I love him.

Yes, G.G.C., your poor old great-grandma is caught; the salt is fairly on her tail, and she doesn't mind a bit, so there! She's glad. But your great-grandpa to be is—well, never mind, you'll never know him, so you can't understand.

But I do hope he won't be very vexed. Suppose he doesn't love me any more, after all, and is just coming up to slang me for taking away his character to Gordon, and to say he's through with me for good. He can't be, he'd write, not come, if it was that. But I can't feel comfortable all the same. I wish it was to-night.

But I must be going to be happy; it's so gloriously sunny and there are hundreds and hundreds of those gold and black butterflies dancing about the flowers. Ada and I caught a dozen of them just now—you can pick them off the bushes by their wings as easily as can be—and we let them all go off together in a cloud, they did look pretty.

It was so funny, too, just now; one of the magpies, in trying to get a drink, fell into the fountain—you never heard such a splashing and flapping and squawking of despair; he nearly wet me through as I hauled him out, and when I stood there, with water dripping down my chin, and said to him severely, "Now, Mag, I hope you're ashamed of yourself," he merely fixed me with a scornful eye, ruffled his feathers, and called over his back as he hurried away:

"Who are you-o-o?"

I had a letter from Micky this afternoon, but not

one from Vane, and they usually write together. I wonder if the cooling process I prophesied has begun already. Poor old Ada! if it has, but I'm sure she'll never breathe a word. Not that there's anything in Micky's letter to make me think that, but often what people don't say makes you more thoughtful than what they do. He only mentioned that the pretty daughter is having a hard go for Vane, now. Humph!

And Marje, too; while I'm on the subject of sisters, I've had the queerest shock about Marje. Though I suppose it's only my imagination, still I can't get rid of the idea. I don't know when it first came to me, but, G.G.C., do you think Max is the man she is really keen on? I know it does sound absurd to say so, and yet—now I come to look back there are lots of little things—and perhaps that is why she gets so angry with me about him. I wonder if it could be, poor old Marje! what a mess up. How she must hate me, to think I don't want a thing she can't have. If he'd only come back, it might happen. I'd do all I could to make him see what a dear she is, in comparison to a little beast like me. But I dare say she'll be married to Petermac before he ever gets back, if he comes at all. What a muddled old world it is for women.

But of course I may be only imagining things. And oh! Bob's coming up to-night.

CHAPTER XXXIX

GOOD-BYE

OH ! great-grandchildren, I wish I were dead. It's all off with Bob, off for good really this time. He'll never have anything to do with me again, and it seems only yesterday I told you I was going to be happy. And the maddening part is —— Oh ! well, I suppose it is my fault, I shouldn't have been so afraid of hurting Max. In future I shan't care a bit about anybody but myself. I'll be selfish and cruel, and heartless, and then perhaps I'll be happy.

Bob came, of course, looking fresh and clean-shaven and very stern. I looked like a shaving-ball, all fluffy. I spent an hour and a half dressing myself, and tried all sorts of frocks and ways of doing my hair. I hesitated for ages between my white *ninon* and a plain grey gown, with my hair taken straight off my forehead, with a velvet band and pathetic droop to my mouth—Gordon says I look like a materialized tear-drop in that ; but I remembered Bob likes me merry, and I couldn't be merry in that more than you could imagine a Quakeress in a ballet.

I spent a horrible half hour before he came. I pretended I was reading, but my heart kept jumping into my throat every footstep I heard. I argued it out fiercely with myself, but I got worked up into such a state of nervousness, I suppose that was at

the bottom of the whole trouble. Of course I told myself it was perfectly absurd of me, he was coming to make it up and clinch matters, and to-morrow we would be engaged, but I *would* have a cold feeling round my stomach all the same, as if I'd eaten too many ice-creams.

And after all I didn't hear him ring. I was chasing Betty down the passage (I found her with one of my most special pet handkerchiefs, which she wouldn't give up), when we saw him hanging up his coat in the hall. I stopped dead and felt awful, and he didn't smile a bit his old way at me, he seemed very stern and polite, and even his red hair looked cold. My knees began to feel wobbly with scare, but Betty saved the situation. She flung herself at him beaming like an electric bulb, he can do anything with her.

We shook hands over Betty's head and then he pinched her cheek. "Hello, kid," he said. (Betty would box my ears if I called her kid, but she only went on beaming.)

"You might find a chocolate or two in my coat," he told her, "if you go and look."

Betty released her hold and grinned meaningly. "I can take a hint as well as any one," she observed. "I suppose you two are going outside."

Bob never turned a hair. I do love his self-possession. "It's rather a nice night," he assented, "unless," he turned to me, "is it too cold for you? Would you like a wrap?"

I just shook my head, I couldn't speak, his manner

was sort of paralyzing me. I never knew Bob could have made me feel so insignificant, he has always spoilt me from our first minute of meeting. I have heard other girls say he was rather stand-offish and wondered how they could; now I was learning why. And you know he hadn't once spoken my name.

By a sort of tacit consent we went to our old corner and for a while we sat there saying nothing. And every minute I felt more queer and scared, and as if some one was walking over my grave. And then I had the most frightful suspicion: suppose there was some other girl, suppose he had really stopped caring for me and wanted to get out of it, but felt he had gone so far that he was bound in honor to propose to me, and didn't know how to begin. I went cold at the thought, and then he started speaking.

"Thyme," he said in a grave different kind of voice from any I'd heard him use before, "I've something very difficult to say to you."

He paused again. I couldn't say a word, I *could not*, my lips were dry. I licked them ever so many times, but nothing would come. I felt as if all the starch had gone out of my frills and my curls were straight wisps of hair.

"It's a difficult subject to discuss," he went on in the same distant way. "Maybe I'm old-fashioned. I know men and girls discuss a good many things together in these days of Shawism, and free love, and other such mad theories" (I thought of Gordon and felt abashed), "but, personally, I couldn't talk about such things with any girl except one I hoped

to make my wife, and unless she had forced me to do so."

He stopped and seemed to wait for something, so I forced out a whispery "Yes."

"I'm not going to tell you how I heard, but I've been given to understand that you've been believing me a more than ordinarily putrid rotter for the last few days. I felt I owed it to myself and you to tell you that what you heard, though how you heard it I can't imagine, is not true. I hope," he added, "you believe my word."

"Oh, I do, I do," I stammered. "I beg your pardon. I ——" But he held up an arresting hand.

"It—it hurt me, Thyme, that you believed me capable of offering an insult like that to the girl I love. On my honor, Thyme, I've never given one thought to another woman since I knew I wanted you. And Daytime"—his voice suddenly altered to the voice he always uses to me, only even sweeter —"you're going to let me have you, aren't you?"

What could I say but "Yes," G.G.C.? Anyway, I didn't want to say different.

"And now, dearest," he said later, a lot later, when we had calmed down a bit, "I'll tell you just how I happened to be with her. No," as I protested, "I know you believe me anyway, but it's a family affair, and you've a right now to know. As a matter of fact I've seen her more than once lately on the family's behalf. I'm not going into all the details for you, but the long and short of it is that she's got my brother Stan pretty well under her thumb. In fact

he's crazy to marry her, the idiot; he's even given her a promise in writing, and she's using it to levy blackmail on us. But the worst is that Stan's infatuation still lasts, that's why we don't want him to come to Sydney if we can possibly help it, but from the looks of things he'll have to take my place soon, and so we're trying to settle with her. You may," he smiled at me, "hear of my seeing her again."

"How horrid," I said.

"It is," he agreed, "to think I may be giving you that for a sister-in-law."

I thought of what Gordon had told me. "But perhaps, perhaps she's not so bad, Bob," I said timidly. "She mightn't really want to be. Perhaps if you let her marry your brother——" I stopped hastily, for Bob's face was thunderous.

"You don't know what you're talking about," he said. "Let us talk of something else." Then the smile came back to his eyes. "Let's talk of us. Daytime, are you sure you love me?"

I laughed up at him. "Nearly," I said.

"You little tease," he answered. "But, you know, Daytime, you ought to be good to me; you've made me horribly miserable lately. I've been feeling like a bear with a sore head ever since that party. I couldn't understand what had happened since Thirroul. And when I came along and saw Haste with his arms round you, well——"

"But you must have known I loved you," I said.

"I thought so, but you might have been only playing with me. You've rather a name of——

Never mind, you can't help men loving you, can you, pet? And I'm sure *they* don't want to help it —I didn't."

We both laughed.

"But it will stop now, won't it?" he went on in a queer mixture of tenderness and authority. "I'm a jealous brute, girlie, and I couldn't stand any more scenes like I interrupted the other night."

"But Gordon was only trying to stop me crying," I explained. "I was miserable about you, and Gordon and I are such friends."

"Humph!" said Bob. "All the same, you needn't go seeing too much of him, you know."

"Oh!" I said disconsolately, "I don't see how I can stop it."

"Well, if you don't, I will," Bob threatened, half laughing, half serious. "And then our blood will be on your head. Besides, it's not fair to him."

"But, Bob," I protested, amazed at his joining in the Gordon-chorus, "truly we're only friends; he doesn't care about me that way."

"Humph!" Bob said again. "Well, he's been a sport to me; perhaps we'll pass him. But, girlie, there's no one else, is there? I mean no one that counts? We've got to play the game fair now, both of us. I never blame a pretty girl for having fun, with all the temptation to it she's got; but I like it open and aboveboard. I can't forgive deceit. There's no one else?"

Oh, G.G.C., why did I answer "No"? Why was I such a fool? To think one little careless question

should ruin my life. But I had made up my mind to write to Max that very night, and he was so far away, and I didn't want Bob to think I hadn't been playing square, and it would have been so difficult to explain! Oh! I had a hundred reasons, and I answered "No."

"My little girl," Bob said softly. "Forgive my asking, dear, but you know how people talk, and I'd heard a rumor about some fellow in the west, or somewhere. I know you can't help his loving you, dear, but I couldn't bear to think that my little girl had been heartlessly stringing a fellow on, especially when he's away."

I shivered. Somehow I'd never realized before that was what my cowardice was making me do. In not wanting to hurt Max, I'd really hurt him more in the end. It sounded awful when Bob put it like that. I hated myself. Oh! why didn't I tell him about it then? It would have been hard, but he did love me, and I could have made him see how I felt—but I didn't.

Bob put both my arms round his neck and bent his head.

"Give me a kiss, Thyme," he whispered, and I put my face up; but, just as our lips touched, I said, "Oh!" I didn't say it exactly, it just seemed as if all the breath in me crept slowly out in an unearthly sigh, as it would if, in the height of happiness, you saw a ghost, and for a minute I thought I had.

"What is it?" Bob said, looking round quickly. And then his nose wrinkled in a frown, for a man

was standing quite close to us, and I suppose we did look a bit ridiculous, and most men hate to look idiotic in front of another man, and, great-grandchildren, the man was—Max!

It was impossible, of course, and absurd, and the hundred-to-one chance, and everything else, but there he was. If only my nerves hadn't been so to pieces that night I wouldn't have made a shipwreck of everything. I'd have introduced Bob before Max had time to speak, and told him we were engaged, and then through sheer chivalry he'd have had to hold his tongue and play up to me. But I could think of nothing to say. I leaned, shivering, up against Bob's arm, and gazed at Max, and I suppose my face was like a sheet; but I couldn't realize it wasn't an awful nightmare, just a phantom of conscience, who stood there gazing at me in thunderstruck reproach.

Now of course it all seems natural enough. Max got leave unexpectedly for his holiday, and never let us know he was coming because he wanted to surprise us, but then—it was the suddenness of it robbed me of my wits, I suppose, and I suppose our faces made Bob think it was worse than it was. You mustn't blame him, G.G.C.; it was all my fault, only I wish I were dead.

He looked at us both, and his face grew quite fierce and cold. He disengaged his arm gently from mine, and I could not utter a word to stop him. I stood rigid, as if I had been glued to the spot, and simply stared horror-struck at Max.

And then Max spoke in a dull tone.

"I beg your pardon, Thyme, I should have gone to the door, but I saw you from the gate and thought you were alone. I'm sorry." He hesitated a moment, and turned to go.

I couldn't speak, but Bob cut in with a voice like a steel trap snapping together.

"One moment, please. It must be rather annoying for you, Thyme, to have your scenes always interrupted. Allow me, sir, to offer you my sympathy; having been in your position myself I can appreciate it. I am afraid my presence embarrasses both of you, so will relieve you of it."

"Bob!" I said, and my voice broke. He was cruel, G.G.C., but then see how black things looked for me. He half turned and seemed to consider; when he spoke again his voice was calmer, but just as deadly cold.

"May I ask," he said, addressing himself to Max, "if you have any claim on this lady?"

I tried to look appealingly at Max, but the muscles of my face seemed frozen.

"That," he replied, "is for Thyme to say."

How could he, how could he? Why didn't he lie outright? But I suppose he was bewildered and angry too.

Bob smiled, a pleasant smile that was more cruel than a blow. "Well, I've had a fair innings, so it seems about time I left the field clear for the next claimant. You seem to like variety, Thyme. Goodbye!"

He went away, and I watched him, dry-eyed and silent. He left Max and me facing each other. Until he was out of sight I never uttered a sound, but as soon as he was really gone I turned on Max like a fury. "I hate you, I hate you," I sobbed. "I never want to see you again as long as I live."

I don't know now how I could have been so cruel, but love is pitiless sometimes toward any but its object; at any other time the hurt wonder of Max's face would have melted me, but in that moment I could have killed him. He stepped forward with a little pleading gesture, but I waved him off.

"You've ruined my life," I said. "Now I hope you're satisfied."

Max's face seemed to go quite white, but perhaps it was only the moonbeams. "Do you love him?" he said.

"Yes, I do," I sobbed, half mad with wrath and fear, "and now he'll never speak to me again. Oh! oh! oh!" I sobbed in a crescendo, and I fairly broke down and cried like a baby. I had just enough remnants of decency to be ashamed of myself, and I made a dash for the house. In the hall I banged into Marjoram, and I suppose I looked a pretty sight with the tears pouring down my nose.

"What on earth's up?" she gasped.

"Max," I sniffed; "he's outside, and Bob's wild, and——" Here I broke down again, but through the distorting tears I saw Marjoram apparently doing unsteady Catherine wheels to the door.

I can't bear it, I just can't. I love him so. Oh! he

oughtn't to give me up like that. I wish —— I couldn't have borne it if it hadn't been for Marje; she has smoothed things over down-stairs. The family know we have had a row, but they don't know how serious it is. You see he didn't say "Good-night," but "Good-bye." I know he'll never speak to me again, What shall I do? Oh! Bob, I love you so; you are cruel.

I suppose I'll get used to it in time, it's four days now since it happened. I even —— Oh! I might as well tell you everything—I even wrote to Bob explaining everything, and begging him to forgive me, and—it's humiliating to confess it, G.G.C., but he sent the letter back, he hadn't even opened it.

You see he's through with me; I've got to face facts. I suppose I'll realize it properly in a day or two, now it just seems like a nightmare, and I can't help feeling I shall wake up soon, but I know I shan't.

Well, good-bye, G.G.C.; I must wash my face and go down-stairs to dinner. I can't let the family see how much I mind. Oh, Bob! and it does seem so silly, for I don't love anybody but you.

CHAPTER XL

PLAYED WITH AND THROWN AWAY

I DIDN'T think there could be anything more dreadful happen to me than what has already, but it seems there could. I suppose I had better tell you about it, great-grandchildren, since I'm giving you the whole story ; perhaps, too, it will teach you never to love or trust a man as your great-grandmother was fool enough to do. Oh, I'm not crying, you needn't think I am. I'd scorn to cry for a thing like he is. And Ida, too! To think she's been fooling me for weeks, maybe months. She knew I loved him. Oh, it was cruel of her, and I used to tell her all about him. I suppose she was laughing up her sleeve at me.

And to think I went in and sympathized with her and—I suppose she thought I'd never know. I suppose I shouldn't have either if I hadn't gone in night before last. I thought all along it was Lance, but I suppose she only used him for a blind. I expect you can guess what is coming, can't you, great-grandchildren ? It's horrible and hateful and vile and—no, I can't say it, but I found Bob at Ida's last night. And she went away with him.

You needn't be sorry for me. I'd scorn to grieve for him now, but oh! why did he do it ? If he loved

her, why did he say he loved me? Why did she let him? Did they both use me for a blind, then, too? It's too humiliating to believe, but what else *can* I think? Why are there such dreadful things in life? I never dreamed it was like this. I suppose I sound rather complicated, G.G.C. I'm sorry, but my head aches so I don't seem able to think straight. I'll try to tell you connectedly. You see her husband is dead. Ida killed him, accidentally of course—at least, I thought so at the time, now I'm not so sure. Oh, Thyme, what am I saying? Of course it was an accident. I mustn't be wicked even if she has spoilt my life.

I'm trying to explain, but even now it seems all nightmarish and confused to me. It's three nights ago now since he died. She rang up late, asking would one of us come in, as her husband was ill, and she didn't know what to do. Dad went, and I insisted on going too. We found Ida as white as a sheet and terrified, and Mr. Lester lying fully dressed on his bed, breathing queerly. Dad telephoned for a doctor at once, and asked Ida why she hadn't sent for one before, but he couldn't get any sense out of her. All she would do was shiver and say in a dreadful whisper, "Is he going to die?"

Once she caught hold of me, and her hands were like wet stones. "Oh, Thyme," she said, "he's dying. I've killed him, and I wanted him to die," and then she started shivering again.

It was simply dreadful, and she wouldn't let us take her away from him till he died. Then the doc-

tor carried her off to bed and smothered her in hot water-bags, and I and one of the maids sat up with her all night. We didn't dare leave her alone; she was almost mad. All she would say over and over was that she had killed him. In a way I suppose she had, for though he died of heart failure, what started it was an overdose. She used to drug him habitually when he was drunk—that's how she kept him quiet, but the doctor said, with his heart, she ought never to have done such a thing, but I suppose she didn't know he had a weak heart.

It was an awful night. She kept saying over and over they'd try her for murder and hang her. But anyway, perhaps because she accused herself so, it was all hushed up. I don't know how; perhaps dad had something to do with it. I don't suppose he'd have liked me being dragged into a murder case any more than into a divorce. I don't think I should have cared. I don't think I'd care what happened now. Anyway, at the inquest they returned a verdict of heart disease.

The night before last I still felt dreadfully worried about her—the maid told me in the morning she was still ill in bed, and I hadn't seen her since that awful night—so I thought I'd slip across and see how she was. I picked her a huge bunch of violets; she loves them. I asked the maid who came to the door if she was any better, and she said she thought she was, a good deal, now. She said she was sure Mrs. Lester would not like me to go away without seeing her, she had had two visitors already that

day, one gentleman had only just gone, she thought. She'd go and tell Mrs. Lester I was there. But I told her not to bother, I'd just run up and peep in her room myself, and if she was asleep I'd leave the violets without waking her.

I went up-stairs quietly, and on the top step I stopped and felt as if I turned to stone all over, for Ida's bedroom door was open, and sitting on the bed with his arm round her was Bob.

I suppose it's a commonplace enough situation, and I oughtn't have been so shocked, but—well, you see I loved him; and, far-away great-grandchildren who may never be, if anything like that has ever happened to you, you'll understand, and if it hasn't you can't.

As soon as the first dreadful numbness went off I started to grope down-stairs again—I didn't seem able to see—and as I went Bob's voice followed me with the most hateful clearness. He said, "You poor darling, of course I'll take you away."

There doesn't seem much more to say, does there? And then I remembered that check that was signed "R. H. Gale." I see why Ida was so anxious to convince me it was her husband's. But I can't understand it even now. Perhaps it's because my head aches so I can't think, but why should they both try to keep me in the dark? And, if he loved Ida, why did he ask me to marry him, I wonder—did I just attract him for the time being, and did he think he had gone so far he was bound to ask me, and was hoping all the time I'd refuse? Perhaps that's why

he was so angry about Max. Perhaps he was glad of the excuse to get out.

I think I shall die if that's what it was, but it isn't true. I can't think it's true. He did love me. And yet how could he have when he's gone away with her so soon? He took her away—I watched them out of my window late last night; they went away in a taxi together. She left a note for me saying she had made up her mind to go away as suddenly as she does all things, she couldn't bear the house any longer, and she would write to me as soon as she was settled again. I showed the note to the family, and mother said she was glad she had gone, and she hoped I'd take a lesson by my narrow escape from publicity and pay more attention in future to her opinion in my friendships. Ah, well! I'm glad they've gone too, only they've taken my heart and all my faith in life with them.

And yet things go on just the same. I am making myself a new frock, and dad tells us all his parliamentary rows, and people come to dinner, and I have to meet Max and Gordon and Dolly Lawrance and Lottie, and nothing seems to have happened to any of them. I can't believe it's real at times that other people's lives are going on as usual when mine's in ruins.

It's almost funny about Max too. I believe he's falling in love with Marjoram. He has apologized about the other night too (it seems a thousand nights ago), and asked can he do anything to put it straight. I thanked him and said no. I tried to be nice, but I

couldn't even feel grateful. I don't seem to feel anything now except a big weariness. I couldn't even be angry when I found out it was little Mrs. Haste who stage-managed his entrance so opportunely. He mentioned innocently enough that it was she who told him I was in the garden; she must have watched Bob and me go. What's the use of being angry—perhaps she did me a good turn after all. If Bob had not broken with me maybe I shouldn't have found out about him and Ida till after we were married. That would have hurt worse, wouldn't it, though I don't believe it could.

And the awful part is that I can't tell any one the real reason it is all off between us, not even Maida. Everybody just knows we've quarreled, and I leave it at that. Perhaps it's absurd pride on my part. I think I could share anything but this with Maida, but even to her I can't confess I've been made a fool of—just played with and thrown away. He's only been playing with you, Thyme; you've got to remember he never loved you.

I passed him in the street to-day—it's the first time I've seen him since I saw him from my window go away with Ida—and somehow when I actually came face to face with him again it didn't seem it could be true, although I'd seen them with my own eyes. Of course he doesn't know I know. We bowed and passed. He looked cold and judging, and I could have laughed: to think he dares to accuse me of deceit—he who has deceived me twice as badly and in cold blood too! It's enough to make

one laugh, isn't it? I try to see the funny side of it, only somehow it hurts too much. I wish I had more pride.

I got a letter from Ida this morning, but I didn't read it. I tore it into a thousand tiny pieces and stamped on them. I suppose it was childish and small, but at the sight of her writing I felt so suddenly bitter I could have torn her in pieces instead of her letter if she had been here. The impudence of the woman to dare to write to me after what she has done! I should like to tell her I know of her treachery, but I wouldn't lower myself to let her see she has the power to affect me at all. I hope I never set eyes on her again. Oh, Bob, Bob,—Bob——

CHAPTER XLI

MAX AND MARJORAM

I AM so tired, so very tired. I never would have believed three weeks could go so slowly—they haven't even crawled. Time has been standing still all the days and slipping away double rates when I was asleep. Three weeks! I think it is three whole lives. If only I could leave off loving him! I don't cry any more now—I don't think I have any tears left—and anyway I don't seem to feel enough to want to. I'm just tired of everything. I suppose in time I'll get over it, but I feel so strange and old. Every time I go to the glass it seems I ought to find my hair gone white, but it hasn't.

I don't look a bit different. I haven't grown thin or got circles under my eyes. I haven't even lost my appetite, not much. I don't sound broken-hearted, do I? But you can't live grief every minute of the day even if you are. I suppose the blatant every-dayness of things and other people to whom nothing has happened make you shamed; it doesn't seem decent to spoil their fun going round showing your sores.

I suppose there is some change about me though, for the family treat me quite differently: they have stopped teasing and preaching at me—mother even

told Betty to hold her tongue the other day when she started asking why Bob didn't come now. But to think I've got to live through another three weeks, and another, and another—I daren't let myself think about it, or my courage fails.

Still, like all clouds, my misery has one sunny spot in it. Marje's happiness is going to come out of it, I think, and I'm so glad. Oh, yes, I can feel enough to be glad of that. I was right, Max really is falling in love with her—in fact, he's fallen. I don't know what Petermac will say; he's away at present. But Max is perfectly happy. I knew one girl would be as good to him as another, and I have to smile when I see them together even if it's on the wrong side of my mouth.

Men are pretty vain, and there aren't many, except a few obstinate ones, who'll go on loving a girl they know doesn't care for them, and I killed Max's affection for me stone dead when I screamed out that I hated him, and then Marjoram flew out as he was going away sore and sulky, and played the sweet reconciling angel, and tried to exculpate me and soothe him at the same time, and I suppose it was like a scented breeze after my storm of temper. He just wondered how he'd never realized before what a dear Marjoram was and what a brick of a sister. Oh, if Marje's shielding me hadn't been spontaneous, like the sweet old sausage she is, it would have been the cleverest line she could have taken.

For I'm pretty sure now it's been Max all along, and my guess was right. I suppose there's going to

be a second broken engagement in our family. Poor old Petermac! But I expect he'll weather it; he's not very sentimental. But, if she did care, it must have been hard for her to have me get letters like I did, but that was why she always cared to read them. What a hard time girls do have; you can't show you like a man if he doesn't like you, can you? I suppose it's hard on Petermac too, her taking him when she didn't care and throwing him over—at least I think she'll throw him over, but it's not altogether her fault. A girl must marry some one, and a man has the whole world to choose from when he wants a wife—at any rate, the whole world of his acquaintance—but a girl can only choose from among the limited number of men who want her.

I have to laugh, though, at the completeness of his cure. He has absolutely no opinion of me at all, though he's nice to me for Marje's sake, and since he isn't worried by damaged feelings he can afford to be magnanimous. I could forgive him too if I could have Bob back. And the even funnier part is I don't care a bit. How I've changed, G.G.C.! Once I couldn't bear to lose any man's admiration, however little interest I really took in him; but now I don't want anybody but Bob, Bob, Bob.

It'd be ever so much worse if it wasn't for Gordon. He has been such a dear; I can't imagine life without him now. I wonder what I would have done if I had married Bob, for Bob—my Bob—would be a jealous husband, and allow me none other gods but him. But it's no use thinking about what might

have been, only you can't help it at times. You get dreamy when you sit by the fire—it's so warm and drowsy—and when you stare hard at the flames they somehow seem so unreal and flickery that you see all the pictures of the things you know never could happen. I'm getting sentimental.

We're nearly all home to-night. Dad's reading the paper, with the flames making the funniest spots on his bald patch; Marje is darning stockings; Ada's doing some kindergarten stuff; and even Fred is sewing—he's mending his braces. Fred's frightfully rough on braces. He bursts a pair nearly as soon as he buys them, and he won't let any of us girls fix them for him; he says we don't sew them firmly enough. But he'll be going up-stairs presently to his room to stew. Fred wants to finish this year, and he is really doing a bit of work for once in his life. We can't get over the marvel of it; he's refusing dances and parties galore to stay home and stew.

But one good thing, it's keeping him away from that girl of his too. I don't think he's quite as keen on her, though, as he used to be, but I don't really know; of course none of us can ask about it—it's not our business, and he'd pretty soon point it out.

They think I'm writing letters. They don't know I'm describing them to you, do they, G.G.C.? I dare say Gordon will be along presently; he generally drops in some time of the day to see how I'm getting on. We went to Manly again last evening. I love that place, and so does he. It always seems sort of adventurous to me, as if things could happen

there, and Gordon feels just the same. We both like to sit there and watch the crowd. Gordon says he never tires of faces; they are the pages in a book that is always writing, an eternal cinematograph film, only more wonderful. He said last night:

"You know, Thyme, the more you study them the more you see; there's always something old in a new face and something new in the oldest. But I hate being with the crowd—going with them. I like to stand aside and watch it sweep on. I hate to be one of them. It's not pride, not that, but if I do I lose my sense of aloofness, and I like best to look on at life. I like being a lone hand and I like being alone. It's a wonderful feeling. Have you ever been quite alone, Thyme—really absolutely alone?"

"No," I answered, "I don't think I have. I think I'd be afraid."

"It is a bit frightening at the beginning, until you begin to merge yourself in the silence round and forget your own being." He locked his hands behind his head and stared up at the stars. I love Gordon when he thinks to himself aloud.

"I think," he went on, "the time I best realized what aloneness meant was one night in the west—one Saturday night. The others had gone to the township over Sunday, and I wouldn't go—I had one of my moods. I was sorry when night came. You can't realize how beautiful and how desolate the bush can be at night with you the only human in it; it makes you feel the insignificant intruder man is. Somehow the silence round you seems noisier than

mere noise, and the more you cower in your tent and hide from it the louder and more menacing it grows.

"I couldn't sleep. I was worn out, we'd been felling trees all day, and even thought was oppressive. I don't think I ever felt such rush of gratitude toward anything as I did to the possums I heard careering about my tent in the small hours of the morning. They seemed to bring a human note back into the threatening quietude. I almost blessed them as they frolicked about my ridge-pole, now and then saying 'Chut, chut' in a queer little way. Then as dawn began to turn in her bed, before waking, I heard some boodie rats squeaking. Then a rustle would rise through the trees, and presently the whop, whop, of a kangaroo, and once the patter of a dingo's feet as he came up to the soak for a drink."

Gordon stopped, his voice had grown, not singsongy, but sort of cadenced.

"It's on me," he said, "the wander spirit. I'm afraid I'm one of those who have to go, go, go till they drop. It's stifling me here again. I'll have to get out, just talking of it makes me eager; but how can you understand the smell of the earth and the way she calls?"

"Oh, Gordon," I said unhappily, "whatever shall I do without you? But," I went on, trying to crush down my selfishness, "of course if you feel like that you'll have to go. I knew something was on your mind, you've been so different lately."

"Have I?" said Gordon with a funny little smile.

"Why don't you go?" I said, rising to perfect

heights of altruism. "There's nothing to keep you really, your mother doesn't need you, she doesn't understand you. I think she lives in a state of perpetual dread of what you will do or say next. And especially now Max is back; he says he means to stay in Sydney now for good. You see, Gordon, there's nothing to keep you."

"No," Gordon agreed with the same queer smile, "there's nothing to keep me."

"It isn't that I shan't miss you frightfully," I explained, "but I hate to see you fretting. Why don't you go?"

Gordon laughed.

"I would to-morrow," he said, "except ——"

"Except what?" I asked.

"Oh, just except," said Gordon.

But he looked at me so strangely. G.G.C., do you think "except" could possibly mean me? Are the others right after all?

Well, I am conceited.

CHAPTER XLII

GORDON INTERVENES

DOLLY LAWRANCE is still being nasty to me, she doesn't know there's no need for it now. It makes me laugh at times, her spite is so transparent; even being miserable hasn't blunted my sense of humor, you see. I daren't let go my habit of laughing at life; habit, after all, is more of a support than religion in a crisis.

Dolly's silliness, you know, comes in saying such absurdly, impossibly, untrue things that no one could be taken in by them for a minute. The sort of thing like yesterday. In front of a crowd of friends, who were remarking what a jolly time we must have had down at Thirroul, Dolly broke in:

"Thyme enjoyed it right enough; I lent her one of my cast-offs to amuse herself with."

As if any one would believe that about me!

They only laughed, her spite was so obvious, but it's funny how blind some girls can be to the ridicule their nastiness brings them, isn't it?

Of course nobody outside the family and Maida knows for sure there was anything serious between Bob and me; outwardly we're just as good friends. We meet fairly often, and we're just charming to each other when we do. It's funny how little, after all, intimacy consists in the things other people can

see. No one would have known from our behavior before that we were more than friends, and no one could tell by the same token that we are anything less.

Oh, yes! we are intensely civil to each other, and at Carsons' last week we even had a dance together. A dance, G.G.C., I nearly screamed at the absurdity of it; a month ago he would have filled half my programme. I wondered first would he ask me, it was the first dance we'd met at since our break, but Bob would never make a girl conspicuous by omission, even if he would not be quite so punctilious in commission. His manner was calm and polite as he came up, among several others, and asked if he might have the pleasure.

I nodded and gave him my programme; I didn't dare trust my voice, and he handed it back with his name on one line. Just one! Oh, there's lots of humor in life if you look for it. We danced it solidly through from beginning to end, and then sat in the ballroom till the music started again. No going out for us now on the lawn, or wandering up and down the paths too happy even to talk.

Oh, no! we kept the conversation going as if we were newly introduced. We talked about the decorations, the floor, the people, the theatre; I racked my brains so that there should be no tiniest hitch for a minute to let us realize the ridiculousness of it, or I should have had hysteria. I was really brilliant, and Bob was polished attention itself; to outsiders we must have seemed to be thoroughly enjoying ourselves, and not one word did we say on the sub-

ject that was like a ghost in front of our eyes the whole time.

And after waltzing a dozen bars of the next dance I swept my partner—I don't even remember who he was—out under Bob's nose into the open, teasing and tantalizing and provoking him brazenly. I suppose it was vile of me, but if you knew how sore I felt—I never thought it would keep on hurting like this. I thought I'd forget in time, but every day it seems to grow worse and worse. Perhaps what rankles more than despising him is knowing he despises me ; it's so horribly unfair ; and yet it's just that that drives me on to behave so as to make him despise me more. When he's about it's as if I had a fever or something inside me pricking me on to be reckless. He left me because he thought me an unworthy flirt, like himself, and ever since I've been really justifying his opinion. I know it. I've been flirting like mad ; I just don't seem to care. Now I understand how it is women with no hearts make most havoc among men. In a way it wasn't me; it seemed as if I stood by like a casual spectator and watched Thyme O'Dea behaving outrageously with a cynical sort of amusement.

And yet, in spite of it all, I can't help thinking he cares still. If it wasn't for Ida —— I wonder why she is not with him ; she is in Victoria because I had another letter from her with a Melbourne postmark. I suppose it was to ask me why I hadn't answered her first letter. I tore it up as well. I don't understand it, but I hate her more than ever, for in spite

of whatever hold she has on Bob it's me he really loves.

At the Hyleses' dance he tried to make it up. That was two nights ago. After our dignified duty dance he hesitated the fraction of a second, as the last sing of the fiddles died away and left us beside an open door. It did look enticing outside ; they had all the veranda shut in with red and white blinds and big palms, and cunning little seats for the discreet, while, if you were bolder, the gleaming gravel paths and moon-nickeled chrysanthemums and laurel hung out a simply irresistible invitation.

Bob looked down at me with the old smile in his eyes, a bit haggard from resurrection, and rather doubtful, but still the old smile. "Shall we go outside?" he said slowly.

I know he was going to ask me to forgive him. I suppose he's ashamed of his suspicions now, for he can't help noticing I'm never with Max, who looks very cheerful and was dancing half the night at Hyleses' with Marje. But I don't know what it was, perhaps the phrasing, the casual "Shall we?" not "Will you?"—it's hard to tell, such tiny things turn the scales sometimes, don't they? I felt that if I listened to him for long perhaps I'd forget my pride and reproach him, and I'd die first. Besides, what's the use of excusing his cruelty about Max? There's always his worse treachery with Ida, and I couldn't speak of that, I just couldn't.

But I didn't want him to think I was afraid to talk alone with him, so I thought I'd give a careless laugh

and say, "Oh, if you like, it doesn't matter to me." All this flashed through my head in less than a second as he stood waiting for my answer, and instead I found myself saying in a voice that didn't seem to belong to me, "Thanks, but really I've been out so much to-night I'm getting chilly; I think, if you don't mind, I'd sooner stop inside."

I don't know what made me for I did mean to listen to what he had to say; perhaps if I had he'd have explained about Ida. You fool, Thyme, as if he could ever explain away what you saw with your own eyes.

But even then Bob persisted, to my surprise. He said, in a queer sort of voice, "But, Thyme, I——" and then those hateful violins tumpty-squeaked again, and Lottie darted past, the perspiring Dave in tow, exclaiming, "This is an extra," and Gordon was at my elbow saying, "Ours, Thyme?" He didn't see Bob, who had been bumped back by some of the couples. I couldn't protest aloud and ask to be left with Bob, could I? So off Gordon one-stepped me in the middle of his speech. I could have cried; in fact I *was* all but crying; and Gordon, after one look at my face, whisked me out to the veranda. He snuggled me down in a chair behind a palm, and sat down himself so as to block the view on the other side.

I clenched my hands tight. I would *not* cry and make a sight of myself, and I took deep breaths stubbornly till at last they stopped sobbing up in my throat. Gordon looked quite worried, but he didn't ask any questions, like the dear he always is. As I

got quieter his face cleared and he took one of my hands and patted it.

"It's all right," I said brokenly, as soon as I could talk, "it was only Bob."

"Has he been rough with you?" Gordon said sharply and frowned.

"No-o," I said. "He—he was trying to make it up."

"Well?" said Gordon.

"You took me away," I explained. "Oh, please don't talk about it." I gave a final dab at my eyes with my hanky and sat up.

Gordon never said anything for a minute and then only one word, but it contained apology and commiseration and every kind of sympathy; he said, "Damn!" and as if he meant it. It comforted me somehow.

"Never mind," I said. "I'm glad you did, because I hate him."

"You don't," Gordon retorted with his usual bluntness. "You love him, but I don't see—meddlers as a rule don't do much good."

"Don't be so silly," I said, with an attempt at a smile as we rose to go in. The smile was rather a failure so I tried again, and Gordon said it was an improvement. "It doesn't matter."

Doesn't matter, G.G.C.! But Gordon still looked thoughtful as he went away. I wonder—oh, but he can't do anything, no one can help. Ida will always stand between us, I can never forget her. Only I can't forget Bob either, that's the worst of it.

CHAPTER XLIII

OUT OF HER LIFE

OH! aren't men stupid? I could shake Gordon, and it's only more vexing that he meant to do me a good turn. And it might have come off too if luck hadn't been against me. You see, I think if I could really see Bob alone he would forgive me, and he might explain about Ida. I believe he's sorry he's broken so utterly with me; but I'd better explain what Gordon did. It was kind of him to try, and it might have come off, you know, though as it happens it's made things worse than ever. I do hope Bob doesn't think I had anything to do with the plot or I should die of shame.

Gordon of course swears it's all my imagination and there was no plot at all, but, as I pointed out to him, I wasn't born yesterday.

It was the night before last, Gordon came round as we were finishing dinner, and said:

"I've come to take you to the Criterion, old girl, so dash up-stairs and undress"—Gordon always calls evening clothes undress. "I heard this morning they've got rather a decent show on, and one of the staff had booked seats for to-night but found he couldn't go, so I took them from him. I say, Thyme," he called after me, "put on that blue frock of yours, the indecent shiny one."

"My new charmeuse," I said, stopping, "to the theatre? What on earth for, Gordon, it will crush it so; won't an older one do?"

"No, it won't," he retorted. "Why am I not entitled to your decent frocks, because I happen to know you well? You put that one on when I tell you."

It was all done so casually, and he had never said a word about Bob for more than a week, that I never suspected anything. I obediently wriggled into the charmeuse, the only way to get into it is to wriggle and wriggle, and all of a sudden there you are, and it fits like polish. I look better in it than any frock I've ever had in my life, Gordon says, because it is itself nearly as wicked as me. But that night when I looked in the glass I couldn't resist a grimace, I looked as white as a ghost. Blue is so trying unless you have a color. I generally have, but I suppose the long weariness of the weeks is telling at last. So I dabbed a spot of rouge on each cheek and examined the effect with a hand-mirror. It was the last finishing touch, and you couldn't tell it wasn't natural.

I walked daintily down-stairs; high-heeled slippers and a perfect frock make you feel dainty. And I felt so happy I could have sung, goodness knows why, because if it was a premonition it didn't come off. On the last step I halted and posed.

"Well?" I demanded.

"By crumbs!" Gordon said involuntarily, and another word would have been superfluous.

"We'll knock them," he said encouragingly as we

went up the stairs, and we sailed in chattering and insolently absorbed in each other. I felt equal to anything; there's nothing like a good dress to sustain you, it's better than a good reputation; and so, though I hadn't expected it, it didn't give me the least bit of a shock to see Bob sitting two rows behind us a little to the left, where he had a splendid view of us. Gordon got those seats accidentally? Don't you believe it for a minute. I'm sure the dear old schemer fixed it up with Dave Davenport, he was there with Bob; they had no girls with them; they are dears, even if it did fall through.

We turned round and gave Bob and Dave the nicest smiles, and then became reabsorbed in each other. I felt so excited I had to talk, no matter what I said, and half the dress-circle stopped gossiping to sneer at (and envy) our animation.

And when the lights were down and the play going on, Gordon would bend right up to my ear and whisper occasionally, and I would nod and look straight ahead, as if I were embarrassed. His remarks were perfect commonplaces, but Bob couldn't tell that.

At the first interval Dave got up to come and talk to us, so Bob had to come too, it would have looked pointed for him to stay away by himself in front of everybody. The conspirators were, of course, simply wrapped up in each other from the first, and Bob had to talk to me. We both talked furiously; there's nothing like a few score eyes and opera-glasses focused on you to make you toe the line, but I felt my

cheeks getting hotter and hotter till I don't believe I needed the rouge at all.

The second interval, before the curtain was fairly down, Bob got up and fled outside, he wasn't going to be let in for a second dose of Thyme O'Dea, that was evident, and Dave had to go out with him, in his turn.

But it wasn't till the play was over that Gordon really sprung his mine. Just before the curtain fell, a note was brought him, and, as the lights went up and we got into our wraps, Dave and he manœuvred so that we were all together, and we all had to chat again for a moment. Bob did that pleasantly enough; as I told you before he would never mark out a girl by treating her stiffly, however much he hated her.

And Gordon sprung the mine.

"I'm in a frightful hole," he said abruptly; "this note's from the office, and I've to go straight off to a murder case somewhere beyond Chatswood. I've just time to catch the last train if I tear. I must go as I am. I can't possibly see you home, Thyme; I was going to pack you off in a taxi by yourself, but perhaps Dave or Mr. Gale will look after you for me."

Of course, both the men had to say they were delighted, and Gordon shot off saying:

"Well, that takes a weight off my mind. Frightfully sorry, Thyme, see you to-morrow. Good-bye, all."

And as Gordon disappeared, Dave said:

"Well, I'll go down and see about a taxi; you two can follow."

It was a clever scheme, wasn't it? Dave would have somehow faded away, I'm sure, and if Bob and I had to go home alone in a taxi —— I wonder if I'd have forgiven him. But fate was against me. At that second the Lawrances saw fit to descend upon us in a body, Mrs. Lawrance, Dolly, and Dr. Philip. Dolly gushed all over us.

"Do let us drive you both home," she said; "there's plenty of room in our car, isn't there, Philip?"

"Plenty," Dr. Philip agreed in his distant cordial way, "that is, if it suits Miss O'Dea. But Copper may ——"

"Of course it will suit Thyme," the little snake broke in sweetly. "We pass her door on the way, and we can drop Bob after. Come along."

What could we do? Neither Bob nor I could protest and ask to be left to go by ourselves in a taxi, could we? And Dolly fastened herself to Bob's side, and made him sit next to her going home. I could have cried, and that made me say good-night as icily as could be when I got out; I was so afraid of my voice quivering. At our gate he half rose as if to see me up to the door, but Dr. Philip was up before him, and Dolly said:

"It's all right, Philip's going."

I guess Fate has got her knife into me for some reason or another, for that's the dead finish; there's little chance of our ever coming together again

now. It's doubtful if we'll ever even meet, for Bob's gone back to Melbourne for good, and his brother has come to take over the Sydney branch, as he told me might happen. Dr. Philip told me all about it when we were out motoring together yesterday.

So it's no use hoping any more that things may come right. I thought I realized all the time I had lost him, but somehow I suppose I didn't, for I never felt like I do now. While he was here there was always just the chance that some day it all might be explained, and, at any rate, I could see him sometimes, and hear about him, and what he was doing.

But now it will be just as if he were dead. He's gone right away out of my life, and perhaps he'll meet some girl in Melbourne and marry her, and I may never even hear of it. Perhaps some old girl friend may catch him on the rebound while he is still sore with me—lots of men are married that way. And I can do nothing, just nothing. It's heart-breaking to feel yourself impotent when it means so much to you.

Oh, great-grandchildren! I'm the most miserable girl in the world, but it's no use whimpering.

Oh! I've no shame. I don't even care about Ida now. I think if he came back I'd forgive him. I'd never even mention her name to him —— I wonder. I don't believe he really loves her; even though she's in Melbourne too. I can't believe he's gone back to her, and yet it's torture to think he might have. You see, I shan't know if he does or doesn't. He might be with her now. I may say I

won't believe it is true, but that won't alter the fact if he is. Oh! Bob, Bob, if you would only write to me, only tell me you still care. He's treated me shamefully, but—I love him. There's nothing to say after that, is there?

Oh, well, I suppose I may as well go to bed.

CHAPTER XLIV

THE HIGHEST BIDDER

I DON'T think things are going quite as smoothly as before with Vane and Ada. Not that I know anything definite yet, Micky wouldn't give his pal away, and Ada's not the sort to talk either, but I'm sure something is worrying her; she's been looking heavy-eyed lately once or twice. I fancy his letters are getting irregular. I wonder if it's the pretty daughter Micky mentioned? It's a good many months now since they met, and at that age you can't expect constancy, but I'm afraid Ada does; she takes things so seriously, and I'm so afraid she's going to be hurt.

You see, she is so open and aboveboard. She is cold and hard to win, but once she gives her affection to any one she is as faithful as can be, and I don't believe she could play hot and cold to save her life. With men of her own sort that might be all right, but Vane is a fish who wants playing. I know his kind, but I'm afraid Ada lets him see she cares in return.

This apparently is the beautiful result, red eyes for Ada. If I could get my fingers on the brat I'd make him sorry for himself. If Ada turned cold now, and hurt his self-complacence, I dare say she could hold him still, but I daren't give her any advice. She'd fly

out at me most probably, besides, it's cheek offering advice when it isn't asked for, but Ada is so young. When I was her age I was as old as old could be. It's strange two sisters can be so different, isn't it?

But I would like her to be happy. Somehow when all the joy has gone out of your own life you realize just how much it is worth. Marje and Max seem to be getting on famously; she broke off her engagement with Petermac last week—I must say he took it well—and I think they are really engaged, she and Max, I mean, but, of course, they don't announce it yet a while, it wouldn't be decent so soon after Petermac.

Mother is very vexed about it, though. In fact, she's angry with the whole family all round. I'm sure she's furious I've lost Bob, although she doesn't say anything. I can tell by the way she treats me. I can't help feeling sorry for her, she is so proud and ambitious, and it must be maddening to have such cantankerous daughters. It's vexing enough for her about me, but to have Marje on top—for, of course, Max is nothing like the match Petermac would have been. Still, it's no use her saying anything there. Marje is like flint once she has made up her mind, and really it's quite comforting to see one happy face about the house. But how I envy her!

Now shut up, Thyme, you mustn't hold the floor too long with your sorrows. We all adore good listeners, because we all like to talk about ourselves, and only listen to others talking because one must take turns, and so, when we meet any one who's too

lazy or too good-natured to take his, we feel as if he had given us a second help.

I think I'll go round to Maida's again this afternoon. I've been there a lot lately. I spent all day yesterday with her, somehow she makes me feel so much better, even if we only talk about ordinary things. Just the being with some one whom you love, and who loves you, gives one a feeling of rest and comfort, don't you think so?

When I went I was hating the world, I can't help getting moods like that occasionally, and I just lay on the sofa with my head in Maida's lap, and talked about Peterjohn, and Jack, and some bargains she got at the sales, and Lottie's and Dave's engagement —it came out Wednesday—and I felt quite myself in half an hour, and was as cheerful as could be by dinner.

I told the nurse I'd put Peterjohn to bed when the pet came in from his walk, so I did, and Maida came and sat in the bedroom with me and criticized my method of bathing him. But when I retorted she could do it herself if she was dissatisfied, she promptly refused.

"If you had as much of him as I do," she said, "you wouldn't be so anxious to deprive nurse of her job. Besides, he hates me to bathe him, he always yells. You haven't much affection for your mother, have you, young man?" and she took him away from me and cuddled him, but he howled dismally till she gave him back, and then he buried his nose in my back hair and grinned wickedly at her. Maida

only laughed, and brushed the powder off her blouse; she wasn't a bit jealous, as some girls would have been, no matter how great friends we were.

"I think you'd better keep him, Timmy," she said, "until he's old enough to have some filial feeling. It's quite evident he prefers you at present. But you really can handle him better than I. I always was a fool with babies. Do you remember when I first became engaged ——"

"I said how jolly it would be when you had a baby for us to play with," I ended for her.

"And I said I knew I should drop it," Maida retorted. "I say, wouldn't our children have fits if we told them by and by all we know about each other?"

"Heavens!" I said. "But I'm afraid I'll only be maiden aunt to yours, Maida."

"Why, is it absolutely beyond hope of ——"

"Absolutely," I sighed. "He's gone back to Melbourne, and I've not had a line. No, it's the finish."

"Poor old kid." Maida gave me a hug as we came out of the door, leaving Peterjohn busy with his bottle. "But who will you have now, Timmy? You must marry some one, you're not cut out for an old maid. What about Dr. Philip?"

"I might," I said wearily. "I suppose one's as good as another now, and that would please the family."

Maida just kissed me.

But it did hurt after dinner to see her sitting on the arm of Jack's chair ruffling up his hair. Of course, they don't mind me.

Ada has called out it's six clock, so I'll have to stop and get dressed before dinner. The Lawrances are taking me to Her Majesty's to-night. I do hope it's something funny. If it's sentimental I believe I'll howl, and that would never do in front of Dolly. I wonder, could I marry Dr. Philip? He is much nicer than I used to think, and he would always be beautifully polite to his wife, and he's well-off, and clever people make a fuss over him; his wife would have a good time. And it isn't a scrap of use my thinking any more about Bob.

I'm afraid I'll have to make up my mind soon. Mother wants me to have him; he hasn't asked me yet, but he will if I let him. Of course, she would never have brought the subject up herself, she is always very polite with us, and doesn't interfere, but that young imp of a Betty tackled me about it yesterday in front of her and Fay.

"What are you going to do about Dr. Lawrance, Thyme?" she inquired bluntly. "I hope you're not going to let him slip through your fingers like you did Bob."

"Hold your tongue, Betty," I said flushing, "and don't be impudent."

"All right," she retorted. "But if you dangle all the decent chances you get like this you'll end up with a beggar like Gordon."

"And if I do," I said, furious with her, a kid of fourteen, talking to me like that, "whose business is it but mine?"

"Be quiet, Betty," mother said, in her gentle icy

way, as she opened her lips for some more cheek. "Of course, Thyme, you know your own business best, young people always do. It is you who must live with your husband, so you had better choose him for yourself. Still, I can assure you," she looked with a queer little smile at the diamonds on her smooth neck—I wish my neck was half as lovely as hers—"there is something in what Betty says: poverty is by no means pleasant. Naturally, as your mother, and taking an interest in your welfare, I should wish to spare you as much unpleasantness as possible, but it is a common wish to buy our own wisdom."

"Do you mean I should marry for money?" I demanded bluntly.

"That depends," mother replied, "on how much you want money. You have never felt the lack of it yet. I hope you never may."

"Then, since I have no brains to earn for myself, I am to be put up at auction like a slave girl to the highest bidder," I cried.

Mother bent over the glove she was fastening in cold disapproval; she says at times I'm vulgar. "Not necessarily the highest," she answered. "You have already had some choice."

Oh! doesn't it sound sordid, G.G.C.? Now, let me tell you a lovely dream I've got. A nice little house, with an infinitesimal garden, of which we would know every grain of earth, where we'd grow our own cabbages and potatoes, and get, oh! so excited if the slugs ate up one little plant. The front

plot should be all roses, and cosmos, and pansies, with the little sun-loving portulaccas bordering every bed, and a round, doll-size lawn, just big enough for two people to sit on at sunset, and watch two fat rosy babies (I *will* have twins, G.G.C., I adore twins) fighting each other, and rolling over like happy kittens, and perhaps a roly-poly puppy to join the scramble.

Then, after dinner (and to cook dinner for him would be quite different from any other dinners), when dark came, and the babies were in sleepy land, we'd sit in the window-seat and tell each other all our dearest thoughts, and half the time there would be no need to speak at all, for we should understand without it. Then I would smooth away all the worry wrinkles out of his forehead, and he would call me his old wife-sweetheart—oh! yes, and, as mother says, the babies would be teething, or else have the measles or whooping-cough, and he would get short-tempered if I burned the dinner in my hurry, and I would resent wearing mended gloves and shabby shoes. I wonder if I would, if it were for him? Love alters one's perspective, doesn't it? I haven't quite decided yet whether it puts one's focus right or wrong; that it alters it is certain.

But there's only one man in the world I could do that for, so, as I said about Marjoram a long while ago, if you can't have the man you want you must have the man who wants you.

I suppose I shall say "Yes" to Dr. Philip.

CHAPTER XLV

ADA AND MR. WYMONDHAM

I'VE been sewing all day putting buttons and hooks and tapes on clothes. The family are off to Cairns for a week or two; when I say the family, I mean mum and dad, and Marje and Fay and Betty are going. It's the Parliamentary recess, and dad thinks the tropical warmth will take down his fat a bit, that's what Betty suggested would be one of the advantages when they talked it over.

Dad only laughed in his jolly, comfortable old way, and said: "All very well for you to make fun of your father, young woman, but you look out for yourself, you never know how you'll end up. You're the image of what your Aunt Emma was, at your age, and now she weighs fifteen stone."

But, anyway, they've decided to go, and have booked their passage; crowds of our friends are going too; this is the fashionable time to escape the winter, not that you can complain of Sydney winters, as a rule. I'm sure they're warm enough. But Marje has got a hankering for the canefields and the thunder of the Barron Falls, she's mad on scenery, and Fay wants the officers on the boat, and mother's going because every one else who's anybody is going—so there you are.

Ada can't get away from her kindergarten, and I

have to stop home and run the house. We can't shut it up because of her and Fred. I don't mind Fred, but I wish Ada wasn't stopping home, I don't like the responsibility of her; she's deep, and I'm sure there's something up. For one thing she's getting a sight too friendly with Mr. Wymondham, and, after what Bob and Gordon told me about him, I don't like to see it.

Several times lately I've noticed him in Ada's vicinity, and she laughs and talks to him in an excited sort of way, not at all like her usual stiff manner. I don't like the look of it at all, but what can I do? Ada won't stand interference, but she is such a baby. I'd sooner it was Fay he had transferred his attentions to; although she is only seventeen, Fay is quite capable of taking care of herself. I'm afraid she is like me, though I never feel flattered when people say so. But Ada, you know, trusts people, and it's really not safe—not with Mr. Wymondham, anyway.

I must just try and keep my eyes open, though I hate to play the spy, even in intent. But when you've got an inexperienced girl trying to soothe the hurt her pride has received from one man with the flatteries of another, and when that other is a scoundrel, and plausible, and good-looking—well, you see, I've got to keep my eyes skinned, haven't I?

It's no use saying anything to mother. I did try, but she only looked at me with her inscrutable smile and said that Mr. Wymondham was extremely well-connected, and, perhaps, one of her girls might pos-

sibly consider her family by making an advantageous marriage.

"But if he doesn't mean to marry her," I said bluntly, "what then?"

"I think," mother replied coldly, "I have brought up my girls to know how to behave. I trust them."

I'll have to go and do some more sewing for the family presently. It's marvelous how many things you find want doing to your clothes when you're going away. There's a button here, a small tear there—about every ten minutes somebody puts a head round my door and calls for me. They're going away to-morrow, and, as I'm the only one not busy with packing, I've got to play ladies' maid to the lot.

I'm going to dinner at the Lawrances' to-morrow. Ada and Fred have been asked too. Mrs. Lawrance said that, as it would be our first night home by ourselves, we might feel lonely. It was dear of her to think of it, wasn't it? She is a sweet woman; I'll like her for a mother-in-law. They all seem to consider it a settled affair already; Dr. Philip is quite possessive in his manner.

Last night I met Bob's brother there. He is so like Bob, the same coppery hair and eyes, but he can't smile like him. He even has his little mannerisms and turns of speech. I felt every now and then as if I were in a dream, and it was the night Bob and I met. I think a voice that is like one you care about hurts more than anything, for, if you only don't look at the speaker, you can fancy it's the other person.

He is very nice, though, and I talked to him all I could. I was pretending it was Bob, and it was lovely, too, to speak to some one who had lived and grown up with him, and spoken with him quite lately. But, of course, Dolly tried to get her knife into me as usual.

"Thyme knows your brother awfully well, Stan," she said as we were introduced.

That doesn't look so bad written, but the way Dolly said it made it sound all sorts of things, but Stan is like Bob, nothing disturbs his polite impassivity, and he just looked at me and said in the pleasantest frankest way:

"Do you?" It saved the situation for me, and I was able to smile back and say:

"Yes, I saw quite a lot of him when he was here; we stayed, together with Dolly, at Thirroul. How is he?" I felt a bit breathless inside, but I don't think any one would have guessed it from my manner.

"I must tell him I've met you when I write," he said as we moved apart.

I wonder if he will. I wonder if Bob will care to hear. Has he forgotten me yet? I wonder what Stan would say if he had known he was being introduced to the girl who so very nearly was his sister-in-law. Heigho! what tiny things do alter your life.

I think I'll go outside and water the lawn, it's so cold sitting still, and no one is calling for me at the present minute. Flowers make one feel happy somehow—ashamed of being bad-tempered, anyway; they are always so smiling and fresh-colored and serene.

I was watering a bed of petunias that had just been planted a while ago, and I had great fun with one of the magpies.

As soon as he saw me with the hose he came dancing and sidling up with squawks of anticipation for a bath; but he was scared to come too close to me, and stood just out of range complaining to heaven of my uncharitableness, so I kindly lifted the hose higher and turned it on him, and you never saw such a happy mag in your life. He has a mania for baths, it's the same one I rescued from the fountain the other day. He had no less than four solid wettings before he was satisfied, and between every two he ran off, looking like a wet rag, to sit on the hose by the tap and preen his feathers, chortling with joy. I think "chortle" seems just to describe a magpie's noise.

I do think it's funny, the way birds crouch and fluff out their feathers and flap under a shower, and then get up and skitter off with bent legs and feathers almost trailing on the ground, for all the world like an old woman with her petticoats coming down.

Oh! there they are calling for me again. I knew I shouldn't be left long in peace. Oh! it's only Betty. Well, she can just call; but I suppose I'd better close up now all the same, it's nearly dinner time.

Good-bye, G.G.C.!

CHAPTER XLVI

DR. PHILIP PROPOSES

I WAS right in my guess about Ada. I had a letter from Micky to-day with full particulars. He says it is that pretty daughter; he is annoyed with Vane, for he says she has nothing underneath her pretty face and that he himself has no time for her at all, which means, I suppose, she has no time for Micky.

"It's this way," his letter goes on. "She's been having a hard go for Vane for quite a while, as I told you. I suppose because when he first came up he was crazy on Ada and never looked at another girl, and of course in the end, seeing her every day, and her being so nice to him, he began to like her back, and now he's mad about her. He always gets it badly when he does get it. Says he's going to marry her. I tell him not to be such a fool. Catch me thinking of marrying any girl for years yet, but I wouldn't be a bit surprised if he cleared off one day and did it, he's like that, and you know a month or two ago his Uncle Ernest died and left him thirty thousand, so of course he could afford it. The girl knows that, and I think that's why she's going so strong. She's a year older than Vane. I don't

know what to do; you see I can't tell his people on him."

She must have let Micky down pretty hard, but isn't it bad news! No wonder Ada is getting circles round her eyes. If only he wasn't so far away. It's true, as the proverb says, that absence makes the heart grow fonder—of some one else.

Perhaps that's what is happening to Bob.

Gracious! I must stop myself always switching back on to him, for I'm going to marry Dr. Philip, although he doesn't know it yet. He asked me to last night, but somehow, although I'd screwed myself up to it and given him the chance to do it, when he actually did I couldn't say "Yes" outright. It seemed so final and irrevocable.

So I put him off. I asked him to wait for my answer till the family got back from Cairns. I said I couldn't be engaged without their consent, and I'd feel so underhand somehow if we were even engaged between ourselves without their knowing.

He was so nice about it I simply hated myself; he blamed himself for asking me while they were away, and said it was sweet of me to feel like that. That isn't my reason at all; it's plain cowardice. I want to stave off the decision as long as I can, and he thinks it's filial respect.

What hypocrites we women are!

Anyway, I'm free for another fortnight. But I feel as mean as catsmeat whenever he comes near me. I do wish he wasn't so—so—elevated in his moral outlook or something. I'm afraid he'll be hard to

live up to. He thinks such a lot of women. I don't wonder, with an angel of a mother like he's got; but fancy Thyme O'Dea trying to understudy an angel.

Sometimes I think I can't do it, but what else is there for me? I can't stay an old maid on the family's hands—it would be dreadful. And I can't earn my own living, I haven't any brains; the only things I can do well are cook and sew, and the family would have hysterics if I started as a dressmaker, or went out as a cook; and besides I couldn't do it, I'd die of shame when I met people I knew.

I wonder why he wants me. I suppose because I'm so unlike himself. He is so cold and reserved, why, imagine, G.G.C., he hasn't once kissed me, not even when he asked me to marry him. Of course I didn't say "Yes," but I didn't refuse. Do you think he really loves me? Sometimes I wonder if it isn't just that he thinks I can talk and entertain well, and would make a charming hostess (this is straight family talk, G.G.C.) for his home, and I haven't any glaring faults he can see, and seem to be docile, and he has reached an age when he needs to settle down, and I'm about the best all-round applicant for the position he has met.

I ought to be ashamed of myself talking like that, for he does love me very much in his own way, I am sure, but it's not a way I'm used to.

Well, I'll have a lifetime in which to get used to it. "Till death do us part."

How terrible and final it sounds; no wonder I put off saying "Yes," but I'll have to some time. Even

Gordon sees that. We talked it over to-day. At least what he said was, "If you feel there is nothing else for you, I suppose there isn't. If you were a different sort of girl—but then it's no use supposing. It's not," he went on kindly, "that you're such a little rotter in yourself, it's the way you've been brought up. Hardly that ultimately, the fault of the system. It's a wrong system, to train up girls to the idea that marriage, even with love, is the end-all and be-all of their existence, for suppose love fails them, as it has with you, they still can't get away from the idea that they've got to reach their goal, even without love. It's abominable," he ended indignantly.

"I suppose it is," I agreed. Gordon always makes you agree with him at the time, even if, when you get away from him, you think his ideas outrageous. "But what else can I do? And he really is a dear, you know," I ended contritely.

"He is," Gordon endorsed. "That's what makes you more of a cad."

Really Gordon doesn't mince his words, does he? I had a sudden flash of temper.

"All right," I said; "you tell me what to do then. I can't see there's any other place for me in the world."

"A place!" Gordon sat up, and his eyes positively sparked at me. "A healthy, able-bodied young woman of twenty-two asking what place for her! Run away from home, if that is what hampers you. Your family don't live to please you, why

should you live to please them? Go out as a nurse-girl, and learn to love your kind, or hate 'em, it doesn't matter which, so long as you get beneath the frill of things and find out human nature, not wrapped up in the swaddling bands of social convention. Then if you find you can't stand it, come back and marry Phil. You'll have at least learned to appreciate what he can offer you. Now you merely look on him as a rather disagreeable way of escape from the family, and a means to the comfort you've been used to, and you'll spend your life fretting because he's not another man who's more of a blithering idiot than himself."

"Why more, Gordon?"

He laughed shortly. "Any man's an ass to want you, but"—he laughed again—"he's a bigger ass not to. Oh! you're educating all right."

"I wish you wouldn't wander from the point," I complained.

"Well, run away, as I said before; it's your only hope of becoming a woman and not a doll. Work your way about the world. Go as a stewardess on one of the boats. I'm going as deck-hand."

"Gordon," I said, "I couldn't. Suppose I met people I knew."

Gordon looked at me queerly. "What an ingrained little snob you are, Thyme," he said. "I wonder if we could dissociate your soul from the exquisite wrapping of your body, how many of us would not be appalled at its feeble hideousness?"

"But, Gordon," I said, passing over his rudeness—

I'm too used to it to mind now, and besides, he doesn't mean one-half he says—"are you going away, really, or are you only joking? Leaving me?"

"It's to get away from you I'm going," he retorted unfeelingly.

"You're a pig," I said.

"You're worse," said he. "You're an octopus that gets your tentacles round men's souls and drags them down, and drowns them in the deep waters of affliction, whence they rise, let's hope, purified and chastened. Perhaps you're some good in the world, after all." He contemplated me as if it were a new idea. He was lying on his back staring up at the sky as usual. Gordon always sprawls if he can, he says it's because he has such a long back to hold up, and he believes in the conservation of energy.

And somehow, as he watched, his face softened, and I felt good-tempered again, and I pulled his hair, and he suddenly opened his lips as if to speak, and just as suddenly caught my hand and pressed it over his mouth, so he couldn't, and while he held it there he kissed my palm. It felt so funny, and from old Gordon too.

Then he pushed it away and sat up.

"Thank heaven I didn't say it," he remarked irrelevantly.

"Say what?" I asked.

"None of your business," he replied. "I'm going home. Good-bye!" And he was over the fence before I regained enough presence of mind to stop him.

I did succeed in grabbing his coat as he jumped, and there we had a tug of war over the fence; but he made such a noise Mrs. Haste opened a window further down and called out to know what was the matter. She couldn't see us because of a tree.

"There you are," Gordon threatened. "If you don't let go I'll tell my mother you're attempting to abduct me."

I let go quickly, for you never know what Gordon won't say, and, as I told you long ago, G.G.C., she has always suspected me of designs on him.

But isn't he the queerest thing ever born? Do you know, I believe he does care about me after all. I wonder could I marry him instead of Dr. Philip? I'd lots sooner if only he wasn't so poor. And yet perhaps we shouldn't get on if we were married. I don't mind his seeing through me now and being rude to me, because I've got other men to pet me and think me an angel; but if he were my husband I shouldn't have, should I? And I can't live without petting.

How awful this does sound, the way I keep dissecting people to see if I could stand them as husbands, but of course this is strictly private, and, hang it all, if a girl oughtn't to weigh a thing like that carefully, what ought she? You might say, if I can't make up my mind at once which I like best, it doesn't matter which I take. It's maybe very handy to decide small matters by such a rough and ready rule, but you wouldn't toss up so lightly if the purchase was of a race-horse, which would cost you some cool

thousands ; much less then in purchasing a husband, when I must pay the price of my whole fortune, to wit, myself.

If Gordon wasn't so rottenly poor! We do get on, and, in a way, I like being treated as a person instead of a pet. Even Bob never quite seems to realize I'm grown up. To discuss anything seriously with me he'd either think indecent, or a waste of time that might be better spent. He once said he hated to weary his lips with talking when they might be put to pleasanter uses.

But of course the chief question is not "Will I marry Gordon?" but "Would Gordon marry me?"

I don't think he would.

And I'm sure I don't blame him.

CHAPTER XLVII

GORDON BREAKS OUT

EVERY one else was right and I was wrong, or rather every one else was wrong and I was right—both are true—for Gordon wants to marry me, although he says he won't. We argued it all out today. We went down to Manly again—don't laugh at our eternal Manly, G.G.C. I don't know how it is, but if we've anything difficult to have out with each other we always go there. It seems the place for explanations. It always seems easier to talk things over out-of-doors ; the winds blow away your pettiness and little tempers and narrow views of things. How, with the endless space over you and the cool detached clouds lazing about some miles above, can you think your tiny worries of any importance in the scheme of things? Gordon and I had tea first, to get up Dutch courage, and then went for a walk toward the Head.

It was a heavenly day. The sea glittered like a necklace, and the usual crowd of holiday-makers, to which we of course belonged, were sprawling on the cribbly sand. Don't you love the little scarlet youngsters who lie, slowly boiling themselves by the hour, in pools about six inches deep! It always

makes my own back shiver in sympathy to think of how they'll feel next day.

We walked along quite sedately, and I suppose every one thought Gordon a moonstruck man and I his fancy; and all the time I was wondering what he had brought me for, and I don't know what he was thinking. He looked lazy and slightly amused as usual, but I noticed several girls looked twice at him, and I began to feel pleased.

He didn't explain anything till it was nearly time to go home. We were sitting on that flat rock on the top of the Head, with the bay on the left and the ocean breaking on the rocks far below our feet, and suddenly Gordon said to me:

"I suppose you know what I've brought you here for."

"No, I don't. What for?" I asked patiently. I'm used to Gordon's ways.

"To make a dashed fool of myself," he replied crossly. "In other words to tell you I am going away, though why the devil I couldn't go without telling you ——" He shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, Gordon," I said dismally, "you're not really. What for?"

"You know well enough, Miss Innocence," he retorted.

"I don't," I protested. "Why should you?"

He eyed me critically. "What a conceited little brat you are, Thyme," he commented. "You know perfectly well why I'm going, but nothing but confession, humiliating confession, will satisfy your dis-

gusting and inexorable vanity. Well, you shan't have it. I may be one of your victims, but I'm dashed if you're going to gloat over me."

"Oh, Gordon," I sighed, "I do wish you'd talk like a sensible person."

"I wish it more than you do," he replied. He took an empty pipe out of his pocket and sucked feverishly at it, but I was too upset to laugh.

"What is the matter, Gordon?" I coaxed. "What is it you want?"

"You!" he snapped with such violence I nearly fell off the rock. "But," he added determinedly, as he stuffed the pipe back in his pocket, "I won't have you."

"But why?" I asked meekly.

"I'd make you miserable and you'd drive me to drink," he replied with uncompromising candor. "You're not the sort of girl for a chap of my temperament. I'm erratic, moody, adventurous, always wanting to be on the go, sensitive to too many impressions—the artist temperament makes a mess of marriage. If I ever do do it, I ought to have a solid, sensible, well-balanced sort of woman who'd put up with my whims and pet me. Now you," he went on accusingly, "want to be petted yourself. You wouldn't soothe, you'd exasperate."

"Gordon!" I said, almost in tears.

"Well, you would have it," he said, "and now I hope you like it. There's a lot too much sentiment wrapped around marriage. Marriage means a home, and a restful atmosphere of peace and comfort, and

soothed nerves, and everything that love isn't. I love you—oh, yes, you're just the sort of girl a fellow like me does go cranky over—but I've got more sense than to think of marrying you, even if you'd have me, and I think you're a good deal too shrewd, aren't you? Anyway, you won't get the chance."

"Gordon," I said exasperated, "you're downright insulting."

"Well, I don't mean to be. I'm not the sort of fellow for you even if I were a millionaire. Do you think I can't see it? You want a man to cuddle and pet you and treat you like a combination of favorite slave and baby sister. I'd expect more of you than you can give, not more than you could give, that's what maddens me at times. You've got the makings of a wonderful woman, but you don't want to be her, and you wouldn't be. Very few of us do want to be our best selves—men or women either for that matter—it's much easier to be just what other people expect. It hurts so to grow to one's full stature in cramped surroundings."

He fell to musing and watching the sea, and for a while there was silence. Then I slipped my fingers into his.

"Gordon," I said, "I'm sorry."

He gave them a squeeze and then dropped them. "For goodness' sake, don't," he said, "or I shall make a bigger ass of myself than I've done already. Hadn't we better be getting home?"

But I didn't move. "Gordon," I said, "if—if it's

only me driving you away, can't we—now I know, I mean—can't we stop as we are?"

"We can stop," Gordon replied, "but not as we are. Nothing in nature stands still. We must go backward or forward."

"How horrid," I said. "What on earth can we do? It's so unusual."

"Why, I thought you were used to coping with these situations," Gordon said, and then he added hastily, "I didn't mean to say that, Thyme. I'm a beast."

"You are," I agreed. "But it does seem so queer, Gordon. I can't get quite used to it yet. Can you?"

"Oh, I've managed to accustom myself to it," Gordon replied, "without any violent effort. But there's no use worrying your head about it, kid, so come home."

"And must you go away?" I queried mournfully.

"Well, there are limits," said Gordon. "You're going to marry Dr. Philip. I'm philosopher enough not to try and cut in where I know it would be madness, but I'm common garden fool-man enough not to be able to stand by and see another get what I hanker after. Of course I must go away, and the sooner the better. I'll soon forget you when I'm where I can't see you," he added hopefully.

I slapped his cheek. I couldn't help it. I reckon that was the limit, don't you, G.G.C.? And coming back to the ferry I gave him such a detailed and pointed address on the peculiarly rotten badness of his manners that it quite drove the other affair from

our heads, and we were both as cheerful as usual by the time we got home.

I suppose I ought to be glad he'll forget me, for when I'm married to Dr. Philip I'll have to stop thinking about other men, won't I? But somehow Gordon's going out of my life, on top of Bob's leaving, makes me feel so terribly lonely.

But it's the first time I cried since he went to Melbourne.

CHAPTER XLVIII

THE TRUTH ABOUT BOB

OH, great-grandchildren, I wonder if after all things could ever possibly get right again. Oh, they couldn't, but just suppose. If they do, it will be all through Stan Gale. He's a lamb and a pet and everything Bob's brother ought to be; and, do you know, I've met him before. It only dawned on us to-night. I'd forgotten all about it. Do you remember when we went to see the kids off, and Bob was on board seeing off Stan? We recalled it to-night, while we were sitting out a dance together at the Mottisons'. He asked me if I wasn't the girl who had been talking to Bob when he came up, and said he had an idea when Dolly introduced us that he knew me, but thought it must be a chance resemblance to some one else since he couldn't place me. Fancy my forgetting too! But we were introduced so hurriedly, as we had to leave the boat, and I had a veil on and furs, so that he didn't see much of my face.

But I remembered the minute he reminded me, and somehow his being introduced by Bob first made me feel I knew him reams better, although he has always been awfully nice to me wherever we meet. And I love being with him; I don't feel so quite cut off from Bob when I'm talking to one of his people.

And he took us home. A lot of us were coming by the last tram, for I'd been to dances the two nights before and felt a bit tired, and Ada didn't want to stop to the end either, she said, as she had a heavy day to follow at "kindy." She looked downright ill. I didn't want her to go at all, but she would. She had great rings under her eyes, and seemed frightfully nervy and restless, for her; she is generally so placid. She danced a jolly sight too much with Mr. Wymondham, too, for my taste. I refused to dance with him myself—of course with the polite evasion that my programme was full, which it wasn't when he asked. And he smiled at me in the most evilly peculiar way, as if he had a wicked joke on me up his sleeve, and I saw him book five straight off with Ada, and heaven knows how many more they really had.

I should like to scrag Vane.

I wonder if he's arranging to take her out anywhere. As I went past them once I heard him say, "Then you won't be afraid to go alone. You can go straight to——"

That's all I heard. But Ada simply must not go out with him. I shall speak to her about it tomorrow, not that I suppose she'll take a bit of notice of what I say. I do wish mother were back. I'm sure they're more intimate than they seem to be, and I feel just worried to death.

I heard him say that just as she came into the dressing-room to get her cloak—he had brought her to the door—but in the hurry of the minute I didn't

think any more about it till now. The others were all waiting in the hall, telling us to hurry up, and I couldn't find my cloak or Ada her shoes. Some idiots had gone into the room and mixed up all the wraps for a joke; it was a perfectly ridiculous joke, for it lost Ada and me our tram.

I found my cloak, after searching for ages, and in the end, after hunting frantically against time among the dozens of pairs about the floor, with the others in the doorway saying they'd have to go without us, Ada discovered her shoes perched on top of the door. She simply couldn't go in her dancing slippers, for they were white satin, and it had been raining all day; they'd have been soaked through before she got to the gate and she'd have caught her death of cold.

And when we did fly out to the hall we ran into Stan Gale, who was waiting for us.

"The others have gone on, Miss O'Dea," he said. "They'd have missed the tram otherwise, and I said I'd drive you both home, if you would allow me. I've got my car here."

"We should like it," I said frankly, "otherwise we should have to ring up for our own, and Smith would be furious at being routed out at this hour again, for he's been kept up late every night this week, and is sulky about it. That's why we thought we'd better go by tram to-night. But won't we be taking you away from your partners?"

"No," he replied; "I'm not booked beyond this. I really meant to leave early myself, so if you'll wait

here a moment I'll go round and turn out any couples who may be sitting out in it and bring it round to the door."

It was a perfect night for motoring, and we had a great drive home. It wasn't a bit cold after the rain, and it was the softest, clearest moonlight. I half-shut my eyes and pretended it was Bob; he looked exactly like him in that light, and the motor was the same one Bob used to drive. And all of a sudden, before I knew what I was doing, I started to cry. I did it quietly though, and I hope Ada didn't notice—she was at the back, I was sitting beside Stan.

He was frightfully upset when I cried, and I managed to stop after a minute. Of course I had to say nothing was the matter. I couldn't tell him I was crying because he looked like his brother, could I? But I felt all along he suspected something, for every time we meet he manages quite casually to give me news about Bob. He does it so nicely too, just as if he wanted to talk about his brother, and it was kind of me to listen and not be bored. But to-night at first I thought he seemed a little stiff, and at last he said:

"Am I to congratulate you, Miss O'Dea, or isn't it public property yet?"

"What do you mean?" I said.

"Well, I hadn't heard it from anywhere else," he replied, looking at me keenly, "that's why I didn't know if I should mention it, but Dolly Lawrance told me to-night you and Pip were engaged."

"It's a lie!" I said indignantly. All of a sudden I realized I couldn't marry Dr. Philip, I just couldn't; if he'd been there that minute I'd have told him so straight out. Somehow Bob's brother saying it made it sound dreadful, but it was like Dolly's spite to tell him of all people. Unconsciously I spoke my thoughts aloud. "The little cat," I said; "she only told you so that you'd tell ——" I realized what I was saying and went scarlet.

"Bob," he finished for me, so nicely that I couldn't be vexed. "That's why I asked you. I don't want to give him a piece of news like that if it's not true. I don't think he'd find it good hearing."

"Oh, he wouldn't care now," I said sadly, before I thought; and then I bit my lip and glanced under my lashes at Stan. But he bent over his wheel, not looking at me.

"I'm sure you're wrong," he said at last. "Look here, Miss O'Dea, perhaps you think it's frightful cheek on my part butting in. It's none of my business, of course, but Bob and I are rather special pals; perhaps it's because we were left on our own for so many years while the family were in Europe, but—well, we think a heap of each other, and I know something's up with him. We're a proud family, and we won't ask favors for ourselves, but, as you see, I can humble myself for Bob—couldn't you make it up?"

He shot the question at me so suddenly, I hadn't time to think of fencing, and I answered just as bluntly:

"He won't. Besides, perhaps he doesn't care any more now."

"He does," Stan said earnestly, and he was so absorbed in what he was saying he nearly ran a man down; "I'm sure he does. I saw something had happened the minute he landed home, and when he never told me a word about it, I knew it was something bad, and ever since I've been over here I've been trying to find out what it was; and when he ignored my mentioning you in his letters I thought I'd hit on it, and when he passed through here last week I knew it was you."

"Bob here last week!" I cried.

"Yes; he passed through on his way to Brisbane. He's on business, but I told him business alone wouldn't give him the look he was wearing. And when I tried to get him to—well, I just brought you up. I hope you're not frightfully wild with me, but I am fond of Bob, and I know he's miserable."

"So am I," I sighed.

"I knew you were," he said triumphantly. "Oh, can't you stop being silly, both of you?"

"What did Bob say when you spoke about me?" I parried.

"He—he told me to shut my head," Stan confessed reluctantly, "but that was because he felt so bad he couldn't bear to talk about you. If he hadn't cared so much he'd have told me all about it. Miss O'Dea, won't you help him out? We Gales are a stiff-necked lot; we can't bear to confess we're in

the wrong. He's afraid to come to you; he thinks you can't care to see him any more. At the end, after I'd urged him to pocket his pride and go and see you, I half thought he would, and then he turned back and said roughly, 'What's the use? She'd probably have me shown to the door, and I shouldn't blame her,' and he caught an earlier train to Brisbane than he'd meant. I don't believe he could trust himself near you, and that's about the size of it."

"Oh, Stan, you are a dear," I said impulsively.

"I'm probably only a meddling idiot, but after what Dolly told me I felt I couldn't hold my tongue any longer. Look here, Thyme" (neither of us noticed at the moment we'd dropped the formal mode of address), "won't you help him out? Bob wants to, but he can't; I know just how he feels. He's in the wrong, isn't he? So you can afford to be generous."

"Oh, but," I said, half-persuaded, "how could I see him? I ——"

"I'll fix that," said Stan, brushing aside all my objections, "when he gets back from Brisbane. You come and have tea with me one afternoon, and I'll arrange for Bob to meet me there while I'm with you. I can even pretend I met you accidentally, if you like; he won't know. Come, you will?"

"It won't do any good," I said despondently.

"It will. Besides, it's your turn to make overtures. Bob told me, when I was arguing with him, that he did try once to apologize, and you simply walked off in the middle of his speech."

"But that wasn't my fault," I said as I remembered the Hyleses' dance and the way Gordon had abducted me. "It was an accident."

"Well, Bob thinks you did it on purpose," Stan urged. "You will say 'Yes.'"

And then it all seemed to come back on me in a flash, and I dragged my hand away. "We're both mad," I said. "I couldn't—I just couldn't. You—you see"—I fought with myself for a bit, and then I blurted it out in a rush—"you see, Stan, there's Ida."

"Ida!" Stan said, starting. "What's she got to do with it? Ida who?"

"Ida Lester," I said. I'd gone too far to retreat now. "Her husband was—was going to divorce her because of—of Bob, and so you see, Stan, I"—I tried awfully hard to keep my voice from quivering—"after that I couldn't ask him to come back to me, could I? That's—that's why I think you're wrong. It's Ida he cares for, not me."

"She's our sister," said Stan.

Great-grandchildren, can you believe it? I couldn't for the minute—it was too wonderfully glorious for speech. And when Stan found out that that was what really lay between us I thought he'd have tipped the car over in his joy. And I felt so ashamed. I might have trusted Bob more. To think of the misery I might have saved us both if I had asked Ida instead of judging by appearances. Still, how could I ever dream of such a thing when she said she didn't even know him?

Stan says that was because she is so proud. Since her marriage turned out badly she has cut herself off from them entirely. I suppose she feels she treated them badly in running away, and she can't bear to acknowledge she made a mistake; she can't humble herself enough, so she has pretty well slipped out of their lives. Bob, though, found her out when he was in Sydney, and insisted on keeping a brotherly eye on her, but she made it a condition that he was never to be seen with her or let any one know of the relationship. Of course she is only their half-sister. Perhaps if Mrs. Gale were her real mother she'd feel different, and besides she can't stand her stepsisters at all, and she feels that even her father belongs to the other camp, not to her. I suppose in a way it's natural.

Stan told me all about it. I can hardly believe it even now. Oh, what a fool I've been! Isn't God good to give me another chance? If only Bob were in Sydney now, I'd go to him and apologize this minute; and to think I've to wait days before I can hear. Stan is going to write to him and explain. Oh, to think I shall see him again! I wonder if he will forgive me for thinking such things about him? But how gorgeous life is, how wonderfully beautiful. Oh, Bob! Bob! Bob! That's three kisses—huge ones!

I must stop writing, it's nearly two o'clock. Ada is fast asleep long ago, or should be. I've heard her tossing about a bit in her room. I mustn't forget to give her that note in the morning. As she was

stooping, hunting about for her shoes, a note fell out of the front of her frock. I picked it up, but in the hurry of the minute forgot to mention it to her. I must try and think of it in the morning.

Well, good-night, G.G.C.! It's time I went to bed. But, oh, I do wonder if things will be right again.

It seems too heavenly to be true.

CHAPTER XLIX

THYME CHANGES HER NAME

GREAT-GRANDCHILDREN, I've so much to tell you I don't know where to begin. The miles of news I have! I wish I could write with six nibs at once and then I might keep pace with all I've got to say. And it all began with that note Ada dropped. You'd hardly believe a tiny thing like that could have made all this happen, for I never thought any more about it till the next afternoon.

You see, I was so tired after several late nights, and sitting up writing to you after Mottisons', when I should have been in bed, that I slept late next morning and when I got down to breakfast Biddy told me Ada had gone to her kindergarten.

"Is Miss Ada staying away the night?" she asked me as I was in the kitchen fixing up for dinner.

"Not that I know of; she didn't say anything about it to me. Why?" I answered absently.

"I was just wonderin'," Biddy replied. "She took a suit-case of clothes away wid her and her eyes looked red. If you ask me, Miss Thyme, there's something on that child's mind. I do hope she's not up to any foolishness."

Biddy still looks on us all as children; she has been with us so long. I didn't take much notice of what she was saying at first, but went on making

the salad, and wondering if Stan and I really had talked about Bob the night before, or if I had dreamed it all; but bit by bit her words sort of ate into my mind, and I began to feel uneasy, I hardly knew why. There was nothing in Ada's taking a suit-case, of course; she might easily have arranged to stay away the night, and mightn't have remembered to mention it. She'd probably telephone me later.

But in spite of telling myself this I began to feel more uneasy. However, I didn't see what I could do, for you can't get Ada on the telephone at kindergarten, and I could hardly telegraph her to know what she had a suit-case with her for—she'd be furious with me for making her ridiculous probably. Several times since the family went away she's called me a "fussy old fowl."

It wasn't till after three, when I was sewing in the sun on the balcony, that I suddenly remembered that note. I don't know why I should have connected it with the suit-case, perhaps what Gordon calls my subconscious self knew more than I did. I put my sewing down and hesitated. We never interfere with each other's correspondence at home, even mother would never dream of reading so much as a post-card addressed to one of us, but somehow under the circumstances I felt I must—although it seemed rotten to do it when Ada was away. It mightn't be of any importance either, I argued with myself. But then what was she doing with it at a dance, and in the front of her frock?

I finally decided to look at the writing and see if I knew it, and when I did, I knew my uneasiness had a reason, for the writing was Mr. Wymondham's. I didn't have any more scruples. I promptly read the note. It was only a couple of lines, no address, and no signature.

"Cabin 37. Ask to be shown to it as soon as you get on board. Wait till I join you there. Remember we mustn't be seen together till the boat has started."

I read it through two or three times without comprehending it, and then the full awfulness of it dawned on me, and I gave a shriek and dropped it. But it was no use yelling; something had to be done, and I was the only one there to do it. I thought rapidly; it was no use trying for Gordon, he wouldn't probably be at the office, and it would take too long to get hold of Fred at the Medical School, if he was there and not at a lecture or the hospital; there was only me left. Ada and that beast! I felt hot and cold all over. But what was I to do? I didn't even know which boat they were going by or where. Well, I'd chance Melbourne first, it was the most likely.

I flew to the telephone and rang up the Melbourne Steamships Office; my heart was just pounding with fright and excitement, for it was after three o'clock already. It all depended whether the boat was sailing at three or four.

"That the Melbourne Steamship office?" I said when Central, after a frightful delay, put me on. "Can you tell me what boats are leaving to-day for Melbourne?"

"There are two," the clerk replied. "The *Warilda* leaves at four o'clock for Melbourne, Adelaide, and the west, and the *Dimboola* at three, for Melbourne only."

"Then she's gone already," I cried, and I hardly knew my own voice. "Well, please could you possibly tell me who has cabin thirty-seven in the *Warilda?*"

"I don't know," said the clerk. "We haven't the booking for her, but if you ring up the Adelaide Steamships they can tell you; she's their boat."

"Thank you," I said, and rang off. Then there was the business of trying to get on to the second office. I have never known Central so maddeningly slow before. I nearly cried as I waited and listened to her monotonous, "Central engaged. Shall I call you when they are disengaged?" I thought I was never going to get them, and the precious minutes were ticking away and it was nearly half-past three.

"Hello, hello!" I said in a wobbly voice. "Adelaide Steamships? Yes? Will you please tell me who has cabin thirty-seven on the *Warilda?* Yes, I want to know who has cabin thirty-seven."

"Certainly," said the clerk. He went away and looked. "Mr. and Mrs. Wymondham," he announced through the 'phone. "It's a two-ber——"

I dropped the receiver like a hot coal and fled for

the door. I forgot even to say, "Thank you." I suppose he thought he was dealing with a raving lunatic.

"Biddy!" I shrieked. "Quick, where's Smith? I must have the car at once."

"Well, you can't," Biddy retorted, "for he's got it round at the garage for repairs this blessed minit."

"Then ring up a taxi," I said, "quick, while I get a hat."

"But what's the matter at all?" Biddy demanded.

"I haven't time to explain," I gasped, half-way up the stairs. "Fly, Biddy, and tell the man to drive like blazes."

I hadn't time to change my house frock; I simply flung a coat over it and snatched up my furs and a hat, and I could have hugged the taxi-man when I found him ready almost as soon as I was.

"To the *Warilda*," I said as I got in, "as quick as you can go. I must catch her."

"Don't think it can be done," he said doubtfully as he looked at the watch on his wrist, "not without breaking the speed limit."

"I'll pay your fine," I said breathlessly. "I must catch her, I must."

"All right, miss," he said, fired by my excitement. "You shall."

And we did, but it was a nightmare of a drive. I sat there holding my watch in my hand, counting the minutes tick away till I felt I should go mad. And all the awful tales Gordon and Bob had hinted about him kept running through the back of my mind, but

the world seemed nothing but a bumping, flying taxi and flying minutes.

And he dropped me at the entrance to the wharf at about two minutes to four.

"Run, miss," he said. He'd begun to take quite an interest in our race by this time. "They're starting to pull up the gangway. Run for all you're worth."

And I did. To see me cut down that wharf must have been an eye-opener to people who say you can't move in tight skirts. As I told you, I used to be captain of our hockey team. The lumpers all cheered, and I almost fell over the bottom of the gangway, scarlet and breathless, just as they were beginning to hoist it. An officer who had torn down it as I approached stopped the men for a second as they hauled.

"Passenger?" he queried, blocking the way.

I nodded, I hadn't any breath to explain.

"That was a close call," he laughed. I just noticed he had blue eyes and a nice smile. "Is your luggage aboard?"

"No," I gasped. "Yes, I mean —— Oh, it doesn't matter," and I stumbled up the gangway while he followed, wondering, I suppose, like the steamship's clerk, what kind of a lunatic he'd struck.

I paused for a minute to take breath when I got to the top, the gangway was half up, and we were already a foot away from the wharf. I felt suddenly like crying. I hadn't bargained on being carried off to Melbourne myself, and the whole place seemed

suddenly full of hundreds of staring eyes, all looking at me. I turned blindly and commandeered a steward.

"Take me to cabin thirty-seven," I said.

"Yes, ma'am," he replied. "Mrs. Wymondham, ma'am?"

I felt a scorching feeling all over, and I couldn't answer. I suppose he took my silence for assent, for he led the way down and drew back the curtain of the cabin, and—there was no one there.

I stood and stared stupidly at him for a minute, and he repeated:

"This is cabin thirty-seven, ma'am."

"But—but," I stammered, "where is the lady who has it?"

"Mrs. Wymondham, ma'am?" he said in a surprised tone. "I thought you were her; there's no other lady been here."

A horrid sick feeling began to settle at the pit of my stomach. "There must be," I said desperately. "Whose baggage is that?"

"Your husband's, ma'am," he replied. "It was he asked me to look out for you, he was afraid you'd nearly miss the boat. I'm your steward."

"But he's not my husband," I said desperately. "I'm looking for——" I stopped abruptly. I remembered I couldn't discuss my family with a steward, and although his face was politely impassive, I could see excitement in his eyes, and I reflected dismally he'd have the tale all over the ship in half an hour.

"You can go," I said abruptly. "I'll ring when I want you."

"Yes, miss—ma'am," he said.

"Miss," I said sharply. "I am Miss O'Dea."

"Yes, miss," he replied with the same irritating calm. "Will you stay in this cabin then, miss?"

"Certainly not," I said, springing up with energy.

"If you haven't a cabin, miss," he went on with growing interest in his eyes, "would you like to see the purser? I'll show you where he is."

"Yes," I said eagerly, and then I checked myself. Ada wasn't in the cabin, but it didn't prove she wasn't on the boat somewhere, and I would have to look for her and consult her first before I went explaining the situation to any strangers. "No," I added, "I won't see him just yet. I'll go on deck a while first. I'll go to him later, he's sure to be busy now."

"Yes, miss," the steward said again, and this time the undisguised curiosity of his glance made me flush.

I left him abruptly and went along the passage with my head held high and my cheeks flaming scarlet. I could feel people glancing at me as I passed, and I knew my dramatic arrival had made me the subject of gossip already. My eyes were smarting, and I was aching to cry, but I looked frightfully haughty. I caught sight of myself in a mirror as I passed through the saloon, and I hardly knew my own face.

And I stepped out of the saloon straight into the arms of Mr. Wymondham.

"My dearest Thyme," he cried, so that the little

groups of people standing about watching the city fade could hear him, "you nearly lost us the boat. I was beginning to think I'd have to get off when I saw you flying down the wharf." His eyes smiled evilly into mine, but to people round he looked the embodiment of solicitude.

"Where's Ada?" I said bluntly.

But he wasn't put out. "Come along up-stairs, dear," he said, "and I'll explain."

I shut my lips on a burst of fury. What could I say in front of all those strange people? I turned, therefore, and walked up the companionway to the boat deck. I walked straight ahead and seated myself on the hatch in full view of the bridge and every one else; but where no one could hear what we were saying. Then I faced him defiantly.

"Where's Ada?" I demanded again.

For a while he didn't reply; he just sat and watched me with his evil smile and chuckled softly. I stood it as long as I could, and then I smote my palms together in anger.

"Tell me where she is; is she here?" I cried.

He only went on chuckling. "This, my dear Thyme," he said at length, "is a situation which I never dared hope the gods would be kind enough to afford me; it is indeed exquisite."

"But Ada," I cried again.

"Haven't you seen her?" he asked gently.

"No," I said, my heart thumping madly again with a fearful hope. I couldn't go on, I just looked at him.

"Well, neither have I," he said after a torturing little silence.

"Thank God!" I said.

He smiled at me again. "No doubt it is nice and orthodox of you to offer thanks for your sister's escape," he suggested, "but have you sufficiently considered your own position? You're in a bit of a fix yourself, you know. In fact, to use your excellent brother's phraseology, you're in a beastly mess."

"You are a scoundrel," I said, white lipped.

"Possibly," he said. "Do you mind if I smoke? You don't seem as appalled as I expected you would be," he went on in the same lazy tone.

"Why should I be?" I demanded haughtily.

"Well," he suggested, knocking off his cigarette ash carefully against his boot, "for one thing your reputation is at my mercy. But I think, though in a way I should like to humble your pride, I think I will marry you."

"Marry me! What are you talking about, you beast!" I raged back at him. "I'll not stay here to be insulted!" I rose to leave him.

He blew a cloud of smoke, and smiled wickedly. "You will feel differently after I have circulated around the boat *my story about you*," he said meaningly; then lifted his hat and walked away as though we had been talking about the weather.

I burst into tears. I couldn't help it, and I didn't care who saw me. Was any girl in such an awful position before? And all because I'd tried to save Ada. I just lay on the tarpaulins and

sobbed myself sick and then I heard a voice say, "Thyme."

I shivered and lay still, and again it said, "Thyme," and it didn't sound like his voice. But surely there was no one else on board who knew me. With a sudden wild hope I looked up and saw—Bob.

I didn't stop to think, I just gave one stifled shriek and flung my arms around his neck. He was better than an angel to me in that minute, in fact he was an angel.

"Oh, Bob, Bob!" I sobbed wildly, and then I realized what I was doing and took my arms away; but I still clung to his hand; I was afraid if I let go he'd vanish and I'd find he was part of the nightmare. "You won't go away, will you?" I sobbed. "Promise me you won't go away."

"Of course I won't," he replied soothingly. "There, don't cry any more, dearest; nobody shall hurt you. You're quite safe with me."

And queerly enough I felt I was, and I soon managed to stop crying. I sat and gazed at him; it didn't seem believable it could be really he. And then I looked up and saw the officer of the watch was smiling sympathetically at us, and I realized how comic we must look, and I drew away. Bob noticed my gaze.

"Don't take any notice of him," he said, "that's only Steve Corr. He's a friend of mine; I've often traveled with him. I was up on the bridge with him when I saw you talking to Gus Wymondham. What has he been saying to upset you so, girlie?"

"Oh, Bob," I said, smitten with a new horror, "what are you thinking of me being here with him?"

"I'm not thinking anything till I hear what you're going to tell me," he replied. "I've learned sense at last."

"If you hadn't come, Bob," I said wildly again, "I believe I should have thrown myself overboard; but how did you come here, anyway? Stan didn't expect you for two days yet. He promised——" I stopped abruptly and Bob smiled.

"What!" said he, "has Stan been trying to make it up between us? the dear old beggar," as I nodded shyly. "He'll be pleased when we telegraph him. But the fact is I haven't seen him. I got a wire in Brisbane to come back before Saturday, and I just rang Stan up as I left the train, but he was out, so I came straight down to the boat. I saw she was sailing, and as I was feeling a bit out of sorts and fed up with trains, I thought the extra half-day wouldn't make much difference. And now through it I've found you."

"If you knew how much more it meant to me finding you," I said.

"Suppose you tell me all about it now," Bob suggested. "Look, it's a bit public here, there's a sort of seat a bit further down where Steve won't have quite such a good view of us. Let's go there."

So we did, and when I told Bob about it, he was so furious, I believe, if I had not restrained him, he'd have thrown the fellow overboard right then and

there. But by this time I had come to my senses. "We mustn't give the affair any more publicity than it's got," I said. "We'll simply ignore him till we get to Melbourne. But when we get there," I shuddered, all the hideousness of it coming back, "what shall I do?"

"Marry me," Bob said promptly, and then as I just looked at him, "It'll have to be one of us, girlie, and you'd sooner me than him, wouldn't you?"

"Oh, Bob," I said, and buried my nose in his shirt-front.

When we got coherent again, quite a while after, we talked it over quietly. "He's a nasty beggar to deal with," he said, "and it's quite possible he might set ugly stories going about you, dear; he's quite capable of it, and they'd be difficult to refute. It certainly seems the most feasible explanation that you're eloping, so why not elope with me in earnest and get it over. We might as well get married now as a few months later—that is if you will marry me at all."

It took us nearly five minutes to get sensible again after that.

"Well, dear," he said, "that fixed up, the next thing is to put ourselves right with the ship. It's a lucky thing, but I know the lot on this boat, and they'll back us up. I'll go and see the captain first of all and tell him the whole story and that we're going to be married as soon as we land. He can let on to the purser and the others that we've run away together for reasons unknown, and it will be soon

round the ship, and we shall have every one's sympathy. He'll take you publicly under his wing, too, for Jimmy is a real old sport and he knows my people. He'll have you sit at his table, and that will put you right if there are any cats on board."

"Oh, Bob," I said, and just looked at him. Somehow as he talked it all straightened out so simply; there seemed to be nothing to worry about.

"Well, I'll run along and get in my version at once," Bob said, "and then I'll have a short conversation with our friend. He won't enjoy it, but I shall."

And then I had another little cry all by myself because I felt so happy.

And we got married next day in Melbourne.

Yes, great-grandchildren, I really am what I once suggested to you in fun—I'm Mrs. Bob. So you see your great-grandpapa is settled, and you'll never dream when you look at our photos that just to be your great-grandparents could have meant such excitement to us, will you?

The captain and Mr. Corr came with us to the registry office. They had both been so nice to me all the way over—in fact, every one was. Bob introduced me to all the officers, and some of them were always talking to me and keeping off curious passengers. Bob said it was better for us not to be alone at all on the voyage. Isn't he thoughtful for me? I never knew he was half as nice. Only it does seem unbelievable he's really my husband at times; it was all so sudden. And unless you've been

married in a registry office yourself, you can't imagine how unreal it seems with a man in ordinary clothes asking you questions, and office furniture all about, and no music or bridesmaids or friends to kiss, though both the captain and Mr. Corr kissed me and wished me luck.

Bob took me to see his people next day. He said we wanted our first day to ourselves. He went the next morning and told them all about it, and then he brought his mother to me at the hotel. It was sweet of her to come, wasn't it? But I never felt so shy in all my life as when a little old lady walked into my room and Bob said, "Mother, this is my wife."

We spent that day with them and that night, and then next morning I went shopping and got some clothes, and we came away. I shan't tell you where we are, but we are having the loveliest time. I never want it to come to an end. Oh, children, it is so gorgeous to be loved, and he does love me so. Of course I know I'm not the first girl he's cared about, or anything like that, but he says I have a sort of special place in his heart that he never knew existed till he found me one day sitting in it. I suppose, G.G.C., you are wondering what particular brand of credulous fool Thyme O'Dea has degenerated into, but it's so easy to believe things you want to.

But do you think he can keep on loving me at this forty horse-power four-cylinder rate? I've got a horrible, skeletal, wriggle-your-bones-and-clank feeling that it's too good to last. But oh, if it dies out soon I think I shall die too. Sometimes I almost

wish I could die now before the cold daylight of sober affection has had time to dispel the rosy dawn of madness. And yet perhaps there's a lot more in life than twenty-two has had time to discover. Maybe there are other things besides love. Only, of course, you can't expect me to think so at present. Great-grandchildren, he —— Shut up, Thyme!

Of course we've had to think a little of the outside world too. We sent a wireless from the boat to Ada saying I was safe and would write when I reached Melbourne, and we telegraphed her we were married, and I wrote to her, and Bob wrote to dad, and I to mother and the family—oh, a runaway marriage means just endless explanations, because we didn't want to give Ada away too badly.

Of course I'm not worried by any fear the family will be annoyed. Mother will be a bit vexed to have missed the frill of a wedding, but she will be fearfully pleased to say, "My daughter, Mrs. Gale," so it will be all right. I haven't got used to being called Mrs. Gale yet. It was so funny last night. We met a friend of Bob's here he hadn't seen for years on *his* honeymoon, and he introduced us to his wife, of course; and Bob said, "and this is *my* wife," and he put the most frightful emphasis on "my," and people who were sitting at tables near us giggled like anything, and I blushed. Isn't it aggravating the way people always know you are honeymooners?

But I think the most uncomfortable minute of all was when I met his father and sisters. They were simply sweet, but the girls looked as if they wondered

whatever I could see in Bob. I suppose most sisters feel that way about their brothers' wives; it seems so funny any one could really get excited over such a commonplace thing as a brother. But Bob says they really all like me tremendously, which is a blessing, though they don't know me very well yet. When we telegraphed the news to Stan, he sent back the maddest message you ever read. The burden of it was, "I told you so," repeated about forty-seven times. Oh, I'm sure we've been giving the post officials a heap of interest this week.

The only thing I feel a tiny bit sad about is Gordon. I had the sweetest letter from him congratulating us, and telling me by the time I got it he'd be in New Guinea. Dear old Gordon, I wonder why nearly every one's happiness means some one else's unhappiness. It does seem to, because two people can't have the same thing in this world, and by some perversity of fate they always seem to want it. Is it because there are so few things to be divided among so many, or just cussedness?

But oh, I can't think long of anybody but Bob. I suppose it's wicked of me and selfish, and I don't know whatever Dr. Philip thinks of me, though Bob wrote to him himself, and he sent back the kindest, most courteous note you can imagine. When I read it I told Bob I nearly wished I'd married him instead. But you can't help being selfish and happy when you're in love.

There, that's quite enough. You must be bored to death, my dears, with my rhapsodies. But now

next time you look at the picture of the fat old frump, remember she was once mad and bad and happy as she hopes you all are. Bob's calling me to go for a walk, so good-bye!

And oh, I should like to know what Dolly Lawrance said when she heard!

By the author of "Time O' Day"

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